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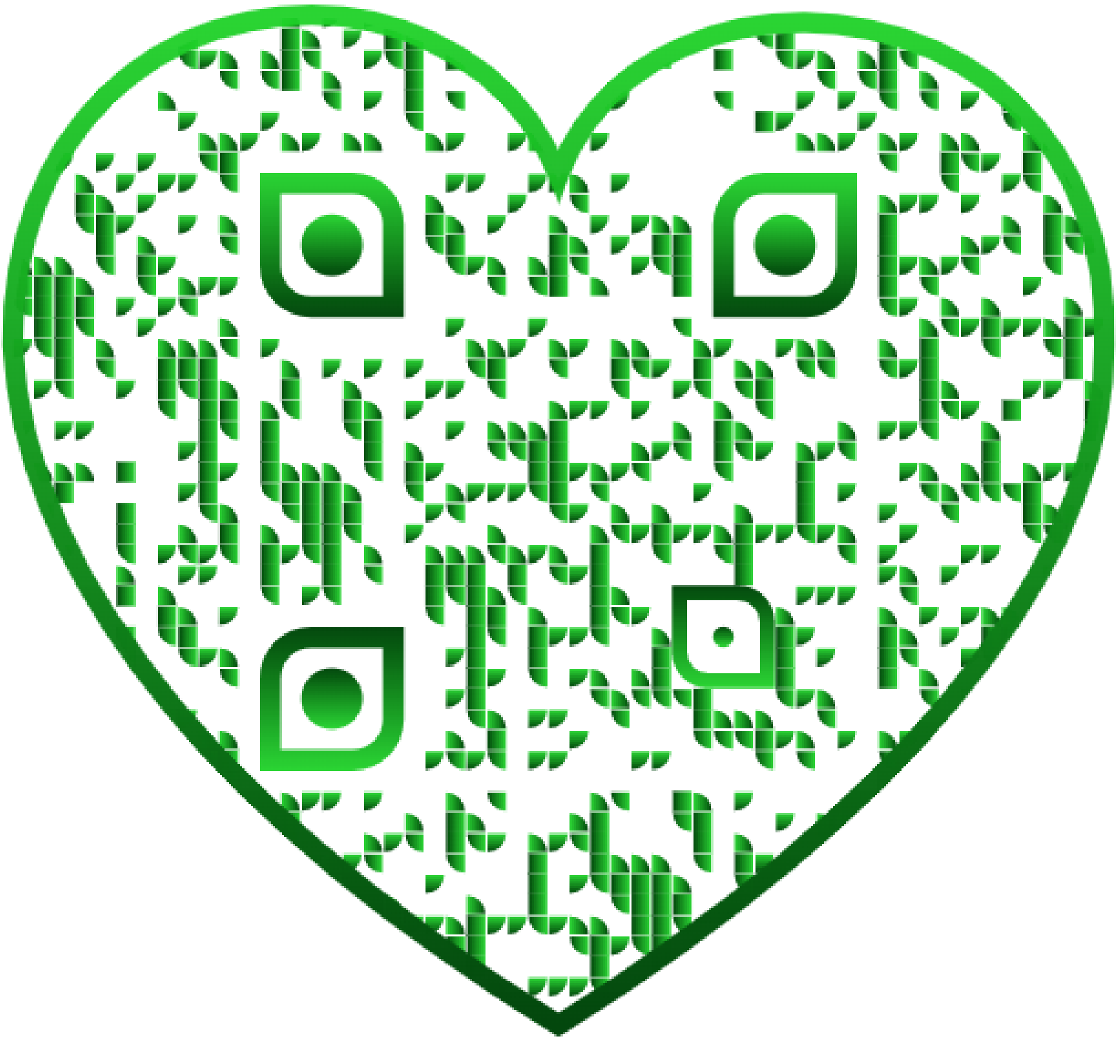

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Following MOM'S EXAMPLE

The Kageleiry family.

COURTESY OF JAMIE KAGELEIRY

I remember the night — it was in the '70s; I was probably in middle school. My mother had decided that going forward, we'd eat at least one dinner a week with no meat. My father sat in front of a bowl of green soup.

"Frances," he said. "This looks … nice. What is it?"

"It's broccoli Cheddar soup!"

"Is … dinner coming after this?"

"This is dinner," she said cheerfully. My brothers and I watched him. "Here's some salad and this nice crusty bread."

My father, who was born to Greek immigrants, had grown up eating lots of vegetables. His mother grew an overabundance of greens in their scrappy New Hampshire backyard — spinach, and mustard and dandelion greens they'd sprinkle with olive oil.

But he wasn't used to eating no meat with his dinner.

He didn't seem as enthusiastic about the idea as she did, but he was an open-minded guy, and he tried it. After that, my mother stuck with it and we had Mondays with green soups, Mondays with stir-fried vegetables, Mondays with meatless macaroni and cheese.

My mother wasn't doing this because she realized meat was bad for the environment. She did know that eating less of it was better for us, but she also wanted to save money. She did environmentally wise things all the time — things like washing her plastic bags (and hanging them out on our clothesline to dry, mortifying my brothers and me) so she could reuse them; retrofitting our clothing to save her from buying new things; and reusing everything from wrappers on butter (to use to butter pans) to paper wrap from the butchers (wash it, flatten it, and draw on it).

In Bluedot Living Kitchen, we'll always aim to give you ways to reduce your meat intake (see our Veggie Tarts on page 58). We do it because it'll save you money, it's better for your health, and it's one of the most impactful things you can do at home to lighten your environmental footprint. In this issue, we even have green soups (Asparagus and English Pea, page 10; Nettle, page 40)!

So to all those frugal mothers (and fathers) — early environmentalists who blazed a path forward — Happy Mother's Day (and Father's Day)!

And thanks mom, for sticking with it.

– Jamie Kageleiry (and Emily Cain and Nicki Miller), editors

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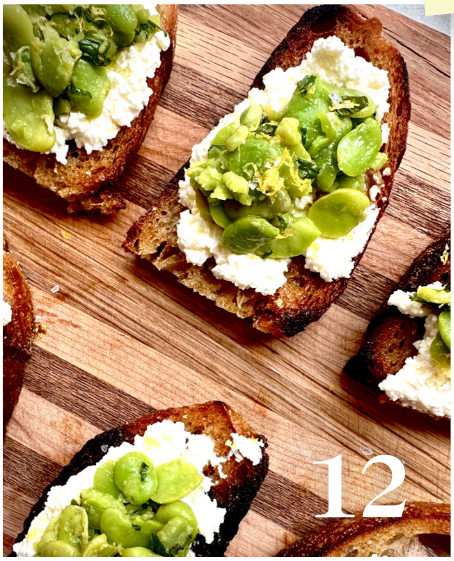
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CLICK IT!
As you go through our pages, type that is bold and a different color is a link to connect you with info, recipes, cookbooks, and more.

COVER PHOTO BY RANDI BAIRD: Food writer and recipe developer Nicole Litvack shows off her backyard calamansi pie topped with fresh passionfruit. See page 13 for how to make a citrus pie.

Note: If you purchase something from one of our links, including on Amazon, we may earn a small commission.

Connecting the Dots

Food Highlights From All Over

Boston: Fielding a Farm Above Fenway Park

Fenway Farms brings fresh produce to the East Coast's most beloved ballpark.

On an early spring day, Fenway Farms seems a world away from the stadium on the other side of the wall. Bok choy, peas, and kale poke up from dirt packed into rows of milk crates. Workers plant carrot seeds. Drip irrigation tubes snake across the crates.

During the growing season — which roughly corresponds to the Red Sox calendar — Green City Growers, which manages Fenway Farms, will harvest 3,500 to 6,000 pounds of fresh, organic produce from a 5,000-square-foot rooftop garden tucked above Fenway Park.

Since 2015, Fenway Farms has been showcasing rooftop gardening — as well as the benefits of energy conservation and farm-to-table distribution — to visitors typically more interested in baseball than sustainability.

Much of the harvested produce goes to Fenway's Dell Technologies Club, where it might find its way into a spring salad. There's also a fresh food bar in the club that serves many vegetables from the farm. These dishes cut down on food deliveries to the park and provide diners with a farm-to-table experience.

Sara Rostampour, director of horticulture for Green City Growers, which has more than 200 garden sites all over greater Boston, says that Fenway Farms has the opportunity to show how much intensive growing they can do in a small space. "It's a model for what our sites can be. With a little light and dirt, there's so much we can do," she said.

– *Clara Silverstein*

2015
FENWAY
FARMS
FRESH PRODUCE

Fenway Farms is on the third level of the park.

NINA GALLANT

Los Angeles: Logan's Gardens Brings Edible Plants to LA Homes

This garden company creates edible gardens in public spaces and homes, spreads knowledge, and sells seedlings at local farmers markets.

At the Logan's Gardens stand at the Santa Monica Farmers Market, owner Logan Williams gives advice on growing edible plants at home.

RANDI BAIRD

Edible gardening, which can reduce carbon emissions from the transport of produce and help foster a connection between growers and their food, has been catching on in L.A. As interest has blossomed, Logan Williams has been there to offer a unique array of seedlings, teach buyers how to care for their plants, and simply share the joy from his farmers market stand.

After neighbors noticed the flourishing garden in their backyard and suggested they turn it into a business, Logan and his father started Logan's Gardens. The company has since created gardens for celebrities such as Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner, Jim Carrey, and Lisa Bonet.

Logan also built raised bed gardens for the Natural History Museum and for restaurants such as the two Michelin Star hotspot Providence and Marino, an Italian restaurant he has frequented since he was a kid.

When it comes to gardening, Los Angeles residents have a temperate climate on their side. Take advantage of it, Logan says.

And for those a bit timid about getting into gardening, Logan says you don't need to transform your whole yard into a garden right off the bat. Starting with even one plant might spark a greater appreciation for our food.

– Lily Olsen

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Colorado: Sustainability Measures in the Craft Brewing Capital

Breweries in Fort Collins are taking responsibility for their carbon footprint and water usage, leading the community toward a more sustainable (and beer-filled) future.

Horse & Dragon Brewing Company invests in carbon offsets and uses local malts in some beers.

COURTESY OF HORSE & DRAGON

A lot happens between the moment the seeds for grains and hops are planted, and the moment you sit in a brewery with a cold glass of beer in hand. First, growers harvest the crops and transport them to breweries. Next, brewers process the grains and steep them in hot water, creating a substance called mash. Brewers then boil the mash, combine it with hops, and transfer it to a new vessel to ferment with yeast. Breweries filter the product before packaging it and releasing it to the public.

Each stage uses a significant amount of water and electricity, not to mention the carbon cost of transportation and fermenting.

The college town of Fort Collins is known as Colorado's craft brewing capital. For residents there, passion for the outdoors, a strong sense of community, and a deep love of beer are practically encoded in their DNA. Residents also value sustainability and protecting their natural environment.

How can the craft brewing industry reduce its negative impacts on the environment to ensure a sustainable future? Several breweries in Fort Collins are stepping up with solutions.

Odell Brewing Company, for example, has the largest carbon dioxide recapture system in Colorado's entire craft beer scene. Their system prevents 1.4 million pounds of carbon dioxide from leaking into the atmosphere each year.

These breweries' sustainability goals are great, but there's a limit to what can be done by individual businesses. This is where beer drinkers come in — voting in local elections for officials committed to sustainability will help breweries do their part in reducing emissions and waste. Consumers can also drink draft beer to avoid packaging and continue to support breweries that are taking sustainability measures.

– *Zanny Steffgen*

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DEAR dot

Dear Dot: I'm Nuts About Nuts! But Are They Bad for the Planet?

Illustration by *Elissa Turnbull*

Dear Dot,
I know moving to a plant-based diet is good for the planet. But I wonder about whether some nuts (cashews and almonds, for example) have a large footprint as well in terms of land use, water use, and transportation. What say you?

– *Ann*

Dear Ann,
A decade ago, Dot was in Turkey for work. Sitting at a bar one evening with a new friend (I swear, I was working! But work makes me thirsty), we began nibbling the pistachios that the bartender had put into a little bowl for us. Now, Ann, Dot had tasted pistachios before. But these pistachios existed on another plane entirely. These pistachios weren't the salty, kinda crunchy version I was used to. These were almost *creamy*. A crunch without dryness. Saltiness without *too much* saltiness. They were sublime. I carried that taste experience home with me.

Years later, interviewing North America's second top real estate agent for a magazine profile, I mentioned these pistachios. The realtor, originally from Iraq, picked up her phone and, to the person on the other end of the call, said something firmly and in a language I didn't understand. Ten minutes later, her adult daughter stood at her office door holding a bag of pistachios. "Turkey!" she scoffed, shaking her head. She held the bag of nuts open to me. "Iraq … much better." And I'll be darned if she wasn't right.

Nuts — truly good nuts — are a delight.

But in the interest of accuracy, Ann, many nuts are not true nuts at all. Cashews, it turns out, are drupes, alongside pistachios and almonds. **A researcher at McGill University in Montreal** tells us that "drupes are fruits that are fleshy on the outside and contain a shell covering a seed on the inside." Actually, in the case of cashews, the seed grows at the bottom of the fruit, but in any case, what we consume is this seed. Peanuts are legumes — part of the pea family, making the "pea" part accurate, while the "nut" part is not. Walnuts and pecans are, according to the McGill researcher, something of a hybrid. And mangoes and peaches, which we don't think of as nuts at all, are also drupes, though we eat their flesh, not the seed contained within. Want to get your hands on some true nuts? Reach for chestnuts, hazelnuts, and acorns.

All these picayune distinctions are enough to drive us, well, nuts. So, for our purposes, that's exactly the term we'll use. Nuts. To mean all the things we normally think of as nuts.

Over the past few decades, powerful marketing campaigns have convinced us that nuts, while calorie dense, are **healthy**. Researchers at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine determined in a study of more than 200,000 men and women in the Southern United States and Shanghai that the more nuts people consume, the lower their death rates from all causes, and especially from heart disease and stroke!

Less death is a good thing, Ann. We can all agree on that. But nuts, like any food, have an impact on our environment. Alas, we cannot live on air. So let's consider how nuts stack up environmentally against other foods. Let's, ahem, crack this climate nut open.

Sophie Egan wrote in ***How to Be a Conscious Eater*** (on Amazon) that more than 80% of almonds eaten around the world are grown in California. "One of the biggest gripes about the high toll on California's drought-stricken agriculture system is that two-thirds of the almonds grown are exported," she wrote. "This 'virtual water' gets shipped abroad. … So, it was a big deal when we learned that it takes an entire gallon of water just to produce one almond. Ouch. Suddenly something long seen as a sign of a health-conscious eater was making shoppers think twice."

And what's true for almonds is true for many nuts, including walnuts and pistachios (both of which, in the U.S., are also primarily grown in California, largely for export).

But Big Nut is pushing back. After that **water bombshell, reported during the drought of 2015**, Farm Together, "a farmland investment firm providing investors with creative capital solutions in real assets," according to its site, responded that "with new technical advances in irrigation that have **made almonds more water-efficient**, they use much less water per kilocalorie of food than many other agricultural products." Which is true, and something we need to consider with any choices we consumers make. If we consider something a "better choice," we need to make clear what it's better than. So, while almonds, indeed *all* nuts, do indeed require a lot of water — 4,134 liters per kilogram of food, according to **Our World in Data** — cheese is worse. Though, surprisingly, at least to me, producing beef requires less water — 2,714 liters per kilogram. (**Beef, of course, has other issues** — deforestation for grazing and carbon emissions in the form of belches and farts — that make it a less-than-stellar environmental choice.)

What's more, we tend to nibble on nuts, as opposed to scarfing down a bowlful, so, nut per nut, the impact remains palatable.

And not all nuts have the same impact. Cashews are grown primarily in Africa, India, and, increasingly, Vietnam — and, as Dot discovers each time she buys them for Grandpa Dot, cost a small fortune. But little of that money makes its way to the workers who gather the nuts. *The Guardian* does a fabulous and disturbing job in **this interactive story about just how poorly workers are treated**, making cashews, at least metaphorically, a tough nut to swallow. If you can, buy Fair Trade cashews. (Caring for our environment must always include caring about the people with whom we share it. Companies that care little for their workers are typically as cavalier about their environmental impact.)

Also, nuts like cashews that make their way to us from far away are also saddled with so-called food miles — the energy consumed to move them from point A to point B. The closer together those points are, the fewer food miles. **Thanks to another letter writer, we know that food miles are not the most egregious food-related climate issue**. (Food waste is far worse.) But, as Dot responded, "Those food miles, **a study published in *Nature*** tells us, are responsible for three billion tons of carbon emissions globally each year — about 19% of total food system emissions. … Local, the study concluded, is part of tackling emissions from our plates."

With that in mind, you might want to eat more peanuts, which (more than peaches) are Georgia's cash crop, and 50% of the nation's peanuts come from there — farmed in **the so-called Peanut Belt**. (If you happen to be driving through Turner County, don't miss the **20-foot tall peanut monument**.)

Pecans are just a nuts' throw away: **Georgia is also the country's pecan pie supplier**, growing an average harvest of about 88 million pounds, which is enough to make 176 million pies.

Hazelnuts are another option that's available domestically in the U.S. (Incidentally, Dot first discovered Nutella — made from European hazelnuts — when living in France in the late 1980s. Peanut butter was absent from *l'épicerie* shelves for reasons that seemed vague and faintly sinister.) While European hazelnuts still make up the bulk of the world's supply, Oregon produces a smaller American variety. And take note: "As a crop, the tree is near-perfect: a low-input, low-impact woody perennial that lasts 30 to 40 years, requiring no pesticides, reducing soil erosion and nutrient runoff, sequestering carbon, and providing wildlife habitat," according to **an article in Modern Farmer**. What's more, hazelnuts have utility as a biodiesel, the article enthuses, noting that as a biodiesel feedstock, "it is superior to the soybean, with better viscosity at lower temperatures and twice the yield per acre. Finally, hazelnut remnants can be ground into meal that makes a high-quality, gluten-free feed for humans or animals."

There's another source of local nuts, of course, that requires little more than a willingness to eat stuff off the ground. I'm referring, of course, to foraging, which, depending on your locale, can serve up anything from pine nuts to chestnuts to beechnuts. There are a number of sites online that propose to guide you, but be warned: There's a bit of a survivalist vibe that made Dot squirm. Google accordingly.

So, Ann, there you have it. Your question answered … in a nutshell!

– *Nuttily, Dot*

Check out our Daily Dot newsletter and get a Climate Quick Tip each weekday, and an answer from Dot each Saturday. On Sunday, Dot rests. ***Sign up here!***

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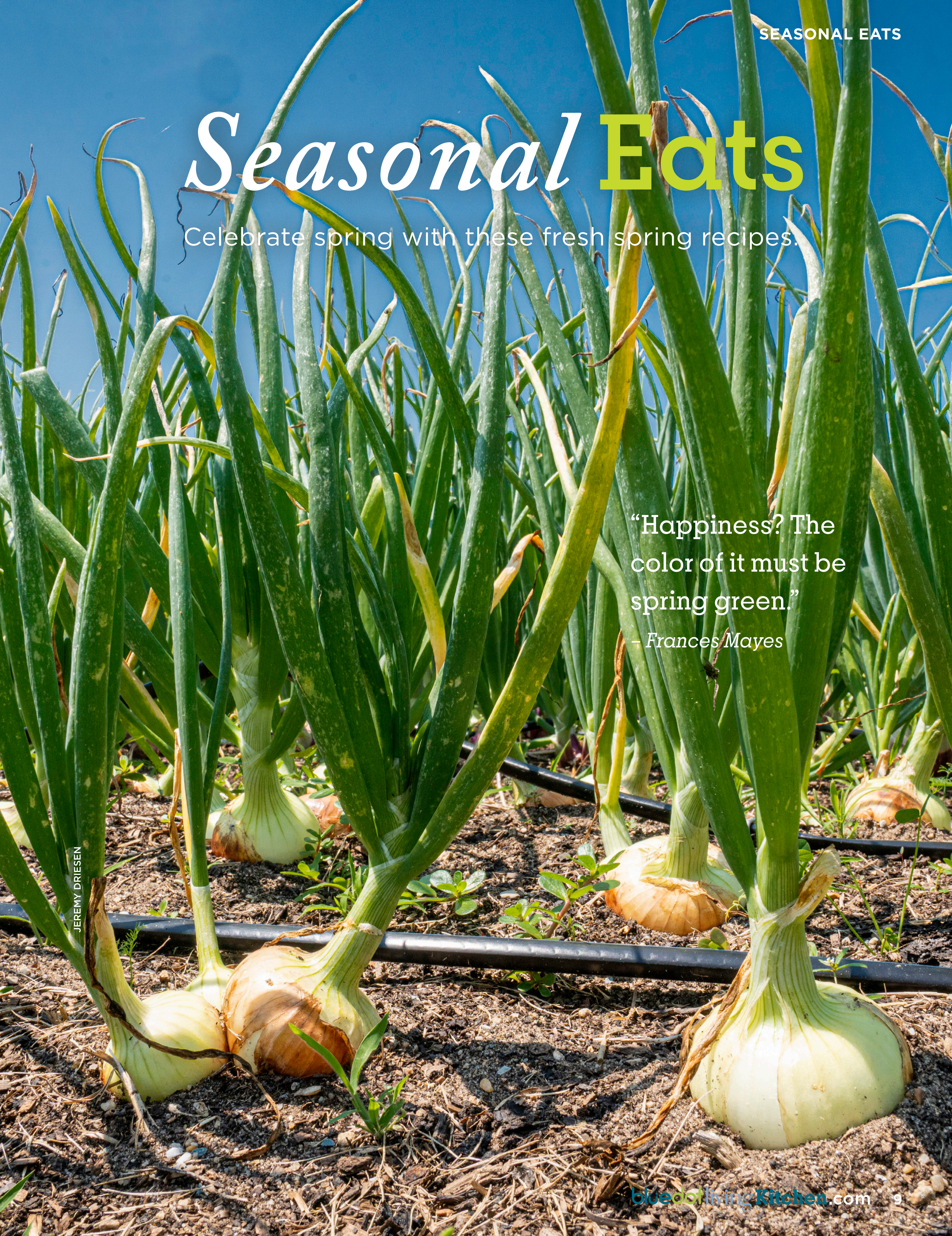


Seasonal Eats

Celebrate spring with these fresh spring recipes.

> "Happiness? The color of it must be spring green."
>
> – *Frances Mayes*

JEREMY DRIESEN

ASPARAGUS AND ENGLISH PEA SOUP

Recipe by *Pascale Beale*

Recipe from Pascale Beale's ***Les Légumes: Vegetable Recipes From the Market Table*** **(on Amazon).**

Sweet, tender, bright green asparagus and crisp, fresh, pop-in-your-mouth English peas at the farmers market are tell-tale signs that spring has arrived in full force. When I find both at the market on the same day, I make this soup. Its color is vibrant, and the flavor is herbaceous and fresh. A bowl of this with a chunky slice of hearty bread is all I need for dinner.

Serves 8

INGREDIENTS

	Olive oil
3–4	shallots, finely diced
1 1/2 lbs	asparagus, stalks thinly sliced
1 1/2 lbs	shelled English peas
	Coarse sea salt
	Black pepper
5 cups	vegetable stock
1 Tbsp	chives

M27 EDITIONS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pour a little olive oil into a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook the shallots, stirring frequently until lightly golden and fragrant, about 3 to 4 minutes.

2. Add the asparagus and cook for 2 minutes.

3. Stir in the peas, a good pinch of sea salt, 6 to 7 grinds black pepper, and cook for 1 to 2 minutes.

4. Add the vegetable stock and cook for 5 to 6 minutes over medium-high heat.

5. Using a traditional or immersion blender, purée the soup until completely smooth.

6. Serve hot, topped with chives, and some crusty bread alongside.

PETIT FARCIS
(STUFFED SPRING VEGETABLES)

Recipe by *Pascale Beale*

M27 EDITIONS

This springtime salad is made with shaved raw zucchini and roasted stuffed globe zucchini. It's bursting with flavor.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- **12** small globe zucchini, stems cut off and reserved
- Olive oil
- **1/2** lemon
- Salt
- Pepper
- **2** large shallots, finely diced
- **8** asparagus stalks, tips cut off and reserved, stalks finely sliced
- **1 tsp** Herbes de Provence or Mediterranean Herb Mix
- **1/3** cup ricotta
- Zest of 1 lemon, plus 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- **8** small yellow squash, entirely peeled into thin strips, then roll up half the strips to form little rosettes
- **1** bunch pea sprouts
- Small handful basil leaves

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 400˚F.

2. Using a small spoon or melon baller, scoop out most of the flesh inside each globe zucchini, leaving a 1/8-inch-thick shell. Place the hollowed-out shells, and the reserved stems into a small baking dish. Drizzle with a little olive oil, a squeeze of lemon juice, and a pinch of salt and pepper. Roast for 20 minutes.

3. While the zucchini are roasting, prepare the stuffing. Pour two tablespoons of olive oil into a skillet placed over medium heat. Add the zucchini flesh, shallots and chopped asparagus, Herbes de Provence (or Mediterranean Herb Mix), a pinch of salt and 4 to 5 grinds of pepper. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes stirring frequently.

4. In a bowl, combine the ricotta, lemon zest, lemon juice, and the cooked vegetable mix.

5. Spoon the stuffing into the cooked zucchini shells, reserve any leftover stuffing. Return the zucchini to the oven and roast for another 10 minutes.

6. On a large platter, spread out the pea sprouts. Scatter the yellow squash strips across the sprouts, and insert the squash rosettes in amongst the strips. If you had any stuffing left over, mound it in the center of the platter.

7. Once the zucchini are cooked, place them in the center of the platter. Scatter basil leaves over the dish. Drizzle with a little olive oil and another squeeze of fresh lemon juice.

FAVA BEAN CROSTINIS WITH RICOTTA AND MINT

Recipe and photo by *Nicole Litvack*

Fava beans are one of the great fleeting joys of spring. As soon as they hit the market, I snag them and enjoy until the season ends. A simple fava mash with fresh mint and ricotta over garlic scratched sourdough is a fan favorite and easy appetizer for the spring and summer seasons. If you can't find fava beans, fresh or frozen peas work just as well.

Makes 6 pieces

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	shelled fresh fava beans
3 Tbsps	olive oil, divided
3	slices country sourdough
2	cloves garlic
	Sea salt
2 Tbsps	sliced mint
1 cup	ricotta cheese
	Zest from 1 lemon
	Flaky salt such as Maldon for finishing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the fava beans in boiling water for about 3 minutes. Strain and immerse in an ice bath or simply set under cool running water to stop the cooking.

2. While the beans cook, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Set the sliced bread in the oil to toast, flipping halfway. Fry the bread for approximately 4 minutes on the first side and 2 minutes on the second side or until toasty gold on both sides. Once cooked, rub both sides with a bit of smashed garlic and sprinkle with salt.

3. Once the beans have cooled, use your finger or a small knife to remove the waxy outer coating from the bean. Set the inner beans in a bowl with the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil and a healthy pinch of salt. Coarsely mash the beans and then gently fold in the chopped mint. Set aside.

4. Halve the slices of toasted bread and divide the ricotta cheese evenly among them. Top each with a dollop of mashed favas and mint. Use a grater or microplane to shave lemon zest over each one and finish with a sprinkle of flaky salt such as Maldon just before serving.

NOTES

- The fava beans can be made beforehand and mashed together with the mint just before serving.

CITRUS PIE (INSPIRED BY KEY LIME)

Recipe by *Nicole Litvack* **Photo by** *Randi Baird*

Inspired by a classic key lime pie, the recipe can use any citrus juice and opts for condensed coconut milk instead of the classic condensed milk. Keep in mind that sweetness will vary depending on the citrus used. I like to cut mine with lemon or lime juice to maintain that familiar tangy profile, but feel free to use whatever is seasonal and on hand. The pie pictured is made with backyard calamansi in San Diego — delicious! ***Serves 8***

INGREDIENTS

The crust

2 cups	graham cracker crumbs (about 18 crackers)
2 Tbsps	cane sugar
2 Tbsps	light brown sugar
1/2 tsp	salt
1 stick	(8 Tbsps) unsalted butter, melted

The filling

3/4 cup	citrus juice
1 cup	heavy cream
1	7.4-oz can sweetened condensed coconut milk
4	egg yolks

The topping

1 cup	heavy whipping cream
1/2 tsp	vanilla extract
1/4 cup	powdered sugar
3 to 4	fresh passionfruit (see note)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Pulse the graham crackers in a food processor or crumble them by hand until they have a sandy texture. Transfer to a large bowl and stir together with the sugars and salt. Pour the melted butter in, and stir with a fork until everything is thoroughly combined. Use your fingers to press everything evenly into a 9-inch pie dish. Position the dish on a baking sheet and bake for 12 to 15 minutes or just until it starts to brown. Set aside and leave to cool completely.

2 Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F. While the crust cools, make the filling. Whisk together the citrus juice, heavy cream, condensed coconut milk, and egg yolks until smooth. Pour into the crust and bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until the filling is puffed up around the edges. The center may still appear quite wiggly. It will firm up as it cools.

3. Leave the pie to cool for 1 hour before transferring to the fridge to cool completely. Pie should cool anywhere from 3 hours to overnight. Once cooled, prepare the topping. Whip together the heavy cream, vanilla, and powdered sugar until soft peaks form. Scoop the insides of the fresh passionfruit onto the cake, and cover with dollops of freshly whipped cream. Serve immediately.

NOTES

- You can use sweetened condensed milk instead of the coconut version if you prefer.

- If you can't find passionfruit, feel free to substitute with your favorite seasonal fruit or jam. How about guava jam?

UPCYCLING Wasted Food

Upcycle Foods is working with partners to use manufacturing waste in a wide range of products, like cake pops.

By *Eric Peterson*

COURTESY OF UPCYCLED FOODS

Using byproducts and surplus foods can reduce food waste, but that's just the start of the upside of this practice that's becoming more

Upcycling food is an age-old culinary tradition. Simply making stew from leftovers is a household example. On a more industrial scale, **Ore-Ida developed Tater Tots** in 1953 to use potato scraps that were byproducts of french fry manufacturing. **Whey protein** is a byproduct of cheesemaking.

There's still plenty of surplus biomass in the food industry's manufacturing ecosystem that could be put to better use. **According to ReFED, a nonprofit striving to reduce food waste**, more than 90 million tons of food go to waste in the U.S. annually, or about a third of the total. About 13 million tons of that waste stem from manufacturing. About 40% of that ends up as animal feed, 30% is spread out on the land, and 4%, or 500,000 tons, goes to the landfill.

Reducing those numbers can have a big impact, as **6.1% of greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to food waste**. It can also increase the nutrition in food products, along with the bottom line of their manufacturers.

It's difficult to calculate the total amount of manufacturing waste that is being repurposed into human food "because most companies won't disclose it," says Alejandro Enamorado, senior manager of capital initiatives for ReFED.

The biggest hurdle is often economics: If it's less expensive to send wasted food to a landfill or compost it, then most businesses will have trouble rationalizing upcycling. Alejandro calls tater tots and whey protein "the low-hanging fruit," noting, "Now we're in this new area of 'What else can we do?'"

Two Ways to Use Waste

Location is key. “If your facility is near other food manufacturers, then the argument could be made that upcycling is the right way to go,” says Alejandro. “If waste is distributed across many locations and is not centralized, transport and consolidating into a certain spot ends up being a challenge.”

Dozens of startups have tried to answer that question in the last decade, often with upcycled snacks and consumer packaged goods (CPG). “We’re looking at a series of science experiments that could be real businesses, but everyone’s still trying to figure it out,” says Alejandro, who explains a lot of CPG companies have shifted to ingredients. “It’s very hard to differentiate yourself in consumer packaged goods,” he says, “and they’ve all made the acknowledgement it might be easier to flow into someone else’s operation being an ingredient.”

Upcycled Foods is one example. CEO Daniel Kurzrock was inspired by the spent grain from his homebrewing hobby and co-founded the company to put it to better use in 2017. As about 80% of brewer’s grain goes to animal consumption, the company developed a process to turn commercial brewing waste into snack bars. It has since pivoted into the ingredient space with **ReGrained SuperGrain+**, a “fortifying inclusion,” says Daniel.

The supply chain is massive: About 20 billion pounds of brewer’s grain is generated by the commercial brewing industry annually, enough to fulfill thousands of large accounts. Daniel says, “A national grocer launching something like a bread on an annual basis is going to use something like the equivalent of 100,000 pounds of the ingredient.”

That’s why Upcycled Foods shifted its focus from CPG to ingredients. “It’s all about enabling other businesses to tap into the upcycling opportunity, both on the supply side and the demand side,” says Daniel. “This is emerging as a way for companies to make good on their commitments for a circular economy and for decarbonizing food products.”

A **2022 study from Capgemini Research Institute** found that 77% of food companies reported internal efforts to reduce waste, and 72% of consumers were more conscious about their personal food wastage after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We know that there is an appetite for more products that are fortified with these ingredients,” says Daniel. “The data is showing increasing sensitivity to the environmental challenges and food waste specifically, and there’s an opportunity to reach those folks with that impact message. But most people buy food because it looks delicious or it has a nutritional value that they care about, and it’s got to be at the right price point.”

Scaling Up for Impact

In 2019, Daniel teamed with eight like-minded companies to launch the **Upcycled Food Association** (UFA). The organization has since grown to “200-plus members in over 14 countries, representing pretty much the entire supply chain,” says UFA CEO Amanda Oenbring.

While North America has emerged as a food upcycling leader, “we definitely have a lot to learn from other cultures who have much more culturally ingrained ways of dealing with waste,” Amanda says. “We’re rebuilding our muscle memory. This is not something new. This is something that past generations just needed and had to do. And I think we’ll be facing those times even more ahead.”

Guided by that same ethos, brothers Adam and Jeremy Kaye launched **The Spare Food Co.** in 2018, then launched the first product, **Spare Tonic**, in 2021. The company used byproducts from yogurt manufacturing to make the sparkling probiotic beverage.

SPARE
STARTER
VERSATILE
VEGGIE BLEND
6 CROP RECIPE BOOSTER
UPCYCLED FROM SPARE FOOD
Save food and the planet
1 TUB

Replacing 30% of beef in burgers in the U.S. with vegetables could reduce greenhouse emissions by as much as 50 millions tons per year.

BEN HIDIER

After growing distribution to 400 retailers, the brothers pressed pause on Spare Tonic to focus on **Spare Starter** and **Spare Burger**, which debuted in the food service channel on college campuses in fall 2024. “It’s exactly the same product in two different formats, either pre-formed patties or bulk blend,” says Jeremy. “And what we’ve done is literally reduced the amount of animal proteins by 30%, which is not insignificant, and replaced it with a cooked blend of six different surplus vegetables, all purchased from farms and farmers and that generally would not have been sold.”

Sales for the two products increased by more than 300% in the first three months. The food service focus allows Spare Food “to work with customers who can commit to pallets at a time, not cases or single cans at a time,” he adds. “We do think that CPG is very important, we just need to have a much more

FIGHTS CLIMATE CHANGE
RENEWAL MILL
UPCYCLED
CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE MIX
FIGHTS CLIMATE CHANGE
RENEWAL MILL
UPCYCLED
DARK CHOCOLATE BROWNIE MIX
RENEWAL
UPCYCLED
SUGAR COOKIE

COURTESY OF RENEWAL MILL

Renewal Mill utilizes byproducts from food companies to make baking mixes and other products. Organic okara flour is sourced from soymilk manufacturers.

effective supply chain. … We will get back there in the next year and a half to two years."

Spare Burger and Spare Starter also "have a much greater impact in terms of reducing the environmental footprint and feeding more people healthy, real food," says Jeremy, noting that 30 to 50 billion burgers are consumed annually in the U.S. "Reducing just 30% of that amount of beef is not insignificant."

Case in point: **A 2018 report from the World Resources Institute** found that a 30% reduction in beef in 10 billion burgers would lead to annual decreases of 10.5 million tons of CO2 (the equivalent of taking 2.3 million cars off the road), 83 billion gallons of irrigation water, and 14,000 square miles of agricultural land.

Expanding Upcycling

In order to further boost food upcycling, Jeremy says that consumer awareness is critical, as is verbiage. "I don't use the words food waste," he explains. "We use wasted food if we're going to talk about it, because it changes that emphasis so importantly onto food, not waste, because nobody wants to eat waste. … For us, it is not waste. For us, it is ingredients that have been overlooked or underused."

Likewise, **Renewal Mill** takes such **ingredients** as oat milk pulp and pineapple fiber and creates flours and baking mixes. Its CPG products are now available across the country at Whole Foods and other retailers as it supplies ingredients to a number of food brands.

Beyond the environmental benefits, upcycling leads to better food, says Lydia Oxley, Renewal Mill's president. "We don't make anything that doesn't taste good, and we also don't make anything that doesn't have some nutrient density to it," she explains. "A lot of our more processed foods, like flour, are so heavily processed that a lot of the fiber and protein don't make it in. By pulling these concentrated waste streams of protein and fiber, we're able to dry and mill it into, typically, a naturally gluten-free flour."

Renewal Mill supplies its ingredients to manufacturers of tortillas, cereal, and other products. "We've been really rapidly expanding our scale for ingredients to be able to meet the demand of the ingredient market," Lydia says. "We see a lot of promise on both sides."

With upcycling emerging as a selling point for many consumers, the UFA developed **Upcycled Certified** in 2021 and sold it to Colorado-based **Where Food Comes From** in 2023. Since the certification's launch, more than 800 Upcycled Certified products have been released, with healthy year-over-year sales growth. In 2024, certified products diverted more than 1.2 million tons of waste; the cumulative total is 3.4 million tons. "There's still a lot of room to grow," says Amanda of UFA.

One big challenge is that the upcycling movement is being pushed primarily by startups, she adds. "Especially in this economic climate, it's challenging for any small business, let alone a business that's really pioneering on a specific topic."

Government policy can be a catalyst. Massachusetts has **banned the disposal of organic material** from facilities that generate more than a half-ton each week. In California, **SB 1383** mandates that 20% of organic waste be upcycled into human nutrition.

Amanda says large food manufacturers making sound business decisions could ultimately drive a potential paradigm shift. "Think of how many businesses are paying to have their waste, poof, go away," she says. "So the chance to transform that cost center into a value add and a value stream is really when people just unlock that aha moment."

CHEAT SHEET:

Try LENTILS & WALNUTS Instead of Ground Beef

In each issue, we'll suggest a way to ditch the animal protein and use a plant-based option.

Lentils are so versatile, but they are a bit soft to perfectly mimic ground beef. By including some walnuts, you'll add some needed texture and healthy fat.

PREPARING IT: Just soak 3/4 cup of walnut halves in lukewarm water for 30 minutes, then drain and chop. Combine with a drained, rinsed 19-ounce can of lentils and then fry in a nonstick skillet with your go-to taco seasonings for a fantastic taco or enchilada filling.

TIP: Small French-style or Puy lentils have a great texture and hold their shape if you decide to cook them from dry.

BUYING IT: Lentils are very consistent across brands, so choose your favorite store brand for the best value. And choose organic when you can.

NOTES

- I used Liviva Low Carb High Protein Spaghetti for added protein.

- For more plant-based cooking ideas, see our full **Cheat Sheet for Less Meat**.

PLANT-BASED TURKISH PASTA

Story, recipe, and photo by *Annabelle Waugh*

Serves 4

The combination of lentils and walnuts serves up ground meat vibes in this flavorful and less fussy twist on the viral Turkish pasta recipe that recently took the internet by storm. Use your favorite plant-based yogurt, preferably one made from a nut base, rather than a coconut base, for the most neutral flavor.

INGREDIENTS

3/4 cup	walnuts
2 cups	lukewarm water
3 Tbsps	plant-based butter or olive oil
1	onion, chopped
1	14-oz can of lentils, drained and rinsed
1 Tbsp	tomato paste
2 tsps	onion powder
1 tsp	ground cumin
2 tsps	paprika
1/4 tsp	salt
1/4 tsp	ground black pepper
8 oz	pasta, any shape
1 cup	plant-based yogurt (like Silk plain almond yogurt)
2	cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbsp	lemon juice
1/4 tsp	salt
3 Tbsps	chopped fresh mint, parsley, or green onion tops (optional)
1/4 tsp	paprika, sumac, or za'atar (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a bowl, combine walnuts and water. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or up to 24 hours. Drain well and chop finely.

2. In a large, deep skillet over medium heat, melt butter. Add onion, lentils, and chopped walnuts. Sauté until onion starts to soften, about 3 minutes. Add tomato paste, onion powder, cumin, paprika, salt, and pepper. Cook, stirring regularly, until onions are tender and tomato paste darkens slightly, 2 to 3 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, in a large pot of boiling, salted water, cook pasta according to package directions. Drain, reserving 1/2 cup of the pasta water.

4. Add pasta to the pan with sauce. Add pasta water, 1 tablespoon at a time, tossing, until sauce easily coats pasta.

5. Meanwhile, in a separate bowl, whisk together yogurt, garlic, lemon juice, and salt for the topping.

6. Divide pasta between bowls. Top with yogurt mixture and sprinkle with mint and paprika, if using.

“The most eco-friendly gear is what you already have.”
– camper Sam Moore

Kelsey Perrett and Sam Moore set up their tent and camp kitchen on Jewell Island, Maine.

COURTESY OF KELSEY PERRETT

Cooking WHILE CAMPING

Eat around the old campfire.

By *Leslie Garrett*

Camping baffles me. While modern living gives us beds and walls and roofs, there is a subsection of humanity that nonetheless chooses — *chooses!* — to sleep on the ground sheltered by little more than a house-shaped windbreaker, and to cook their food without the benefit of an oven, air fryer, or sous vide. A friend of mine looks forward, each year, to his winter camping trip in Canada's Northwest Territories which … *shudder.*

Nonetheless, I can't deny that camping fits into a "back to nature" ethos and that, done right, it leaves a far lighter footprint on our planet than a cabin or cottage. I say "done right" because all human activity, of course, has an impact.

So I reached out to a few keen camping friends, including **Bluedot contributor and happy camper Sam Moore**, to get specifics on "done right." Their tips range from gear specific to best practices.

Sam's advice hews to my own regarding gear of any sort. "The most eco-friendly gear is what you already have," he insists. Sam has used the same backpack for at least a decade — long enough that he can't recall its provenance. When he does need something new or to replace something that's worn out, he turns to second-hand options. "Depending on where you live, there are some great resources for used camping gear, and often in those places you can also find people who are more knowledgeable about making recommendations," Sam tells me. "Up here in Maine, we have the **Portland Gear Hub**, as well as some nice cooperatives like **Maine Gear Share**." Look for similar local hubs in your area. Or check out online sites such as **Geartrade**, **REI ReSupply**, **Rerouted**, and **Out & Back**.

The Camping Kitchen

Another friend of mine who pitches her tent in various of Canada's provincial parks insists that prepping is key to delicious camp-friendly meals. "Everything should be prepared in advance at home if you want good food," she tells me. "Sauces for pastas or salad dressings … into little reusable containers they go." She adds, "I cut and parboil potatoes in advance and then you have hash browns for breakfast and throw eggs right over them. Mix your own pancake mix in Tupperware."

She recommends that you freeze everything in advance. And, instead of ice in a cooler, she fills an empty soda or juice container with water and pops that in a cooler as an ice pack. "Works like a charm," she says.

Kelsey Perrett, Bluedot's digital projects manager (and camping and life partner of Sam Moore), uses a **food dehydrator** and **reusable silicone bags** in order to lighten the load on the couple's backpacking and cycling trips. She adds that "people love" **Borvo** instant bone broth, which comes in easy-to-pack compostable sleeves.

My Canadian friend relies on an old-fashioned campfire to cook her meals, careful to use established fire pits, keep fires small, use dead wood, and ensure that fires are completely extinguished. A better choice might be a camp stove fueled with renewable energy. **BioLite has some great options** (and Kelsey favors their products).

Take **reusable cutlery** and **dishes** or biodegradable options. And when it comes time to wash up, an all-in-one detergent like **Dr. Bronner's Castile soap** (buy the **refill carton**, then portion it into smaller reusable containers for a lighter load) or **Campsuds** does the job. And pick up extras — pastries or fruit — at local markets.

The Garbage

"Leave no trace" is a camper's mantra and it means exactly what it sounds like. Once you're gone, it should be as though you were never there.

SHUTTERSTOCK

CAMP COOKING TIPS

For dinner, choose between foil packets or fajitas, and use the leftovers for tasty breakfast burritos the next day.

Cooking outdoors doesn't mean sacrificing flavor or relying on prepackaged meals. With thoughtful preparation, your campsite cuisine can be both delicious and nutritious. The key to successful outdoor cooking lies in smart prep before your trip and efficient use of ingredients to minimize waste and simplify cleanup. By creating meals that build on each other with overlapping ingredients, you can enjoy hearty dinners by the fire and transform leftovers into energizing breakfasts with minimal effort — leaving more time to enjoy the outdoors rather than cooking and cleaning.

- **Prep at home:** Pre-chop vegetables, marinate proteins, and measure spices into small containers. Use camping as an opportunity to use up herbs and spices from your cabinet.
- **Equipment choice:** Bring a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet if you're car camping — it's versatile for both campfire coals and camp stoves and is easy to clean.
- **Smart packing:** Choose tortillas over bread — they pack flat, don't crush, and stay fresher longer. Use reusable containers or silicone bags to reduce waste.
- **Temperature management:** For multi-day trips, freeze meat the day before to serve as ice in your cooler until you're ready to cook.
- **Meal planning strategy:** Schedule meals by perishability — use seafood first, then fresh meat, saving shelf-stable options for later days. Cut proteins into bite-sized pieces before your trip for easier cooking and less cleanup.
- **Easy flavor boosters:** Pack a small bottle of quality olive oil, salt, pepper, and versatile spice blends. Bring premade sauces that work with multiple meals.
- **Smart ingredient choices:** Choose fast-cooking proteins for simpler meals. Canned beans offer shelf-stable protein that can easily be added to lots of dishes. Slightly underripe avocados ripen perfectly during your trip, or pre-make guacamole with extra lime juice in a sealed container.
- **Time-saving options:** If rushed, use pre-marinated meats for fajitas to simplify preparation.

— By Justin McChesney-Wachs

CAMPFIRE FOIL PACKETS

Tips, recipes and photos by *Justin McChesney-Wachs*

These custom protein and vegetable packets are the perfect trail reward with minimal cleanup. The steam inside cooks everything to create a satisfying meal right from the fire. This is designed to make enough for two hungry campers, with leftovers for the next day's breakfast burritos (see p. 23).

Serves 2

INGREDIENTS

8 oz	baby potatoes, preboiled at home for 5 minutes until fork tender
1	bell pepper, sliced into strips
1/2	red onion, sliced
1	bunch (about 3/4 lb) asparagus, ends trimmed or sliced zucchini
	Salt and pepper
2	8-oz salmon fillets or sliced precooked sausages or 1 lb peeled and deveined shrimp
2 Tbsps	butter or olive oil, divided
	Fresh herbs: thyme, rosemary, or parsley
1/2	lemon, quartered

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Tear off two 12-by-18-inch sheets of heavy-duty foil. Divide vegetables equally among foil sheets, season with salt and pepper.

2. Top each with either a salmon fillet, sliced sausage, or half the shrimp. Season the salmon or shrimp with salt and pepper. Add 1 tablespoon butter or olive oil and fresh herbs on top of the protein in each packet.

3. Fold the foil to create sealed packets with an inch or so of space on top for the steam to expand. You want to seal the packet tightly, but still make it easy to open when it's time to peek to check on doneness.

4. Place on the grill grate directly over the hot coals of your campfire, or cook in a cast-iron skillet on the stove if you don't have a campfire. Cook for 12 to 20 minutes, or until the fish is flaky, sausage is heated through, or shrimp is pink and opaque (shrimp will be the quickest).

5. Carefully open packets (watch out for hot steam) and serve with lemon wedges. You can eat right out of the foil packet or transfer to a plate, reserving leftovers for breakfast burritos.

NOTES

- Choose other meat or plant-based proteins such as Beyond's sausages or portobello mushrooms.

- Cook time will vary. Thinner pieces of salmon may cook in just 12 minutes over a very hot fire, while thicker pieces or cooler fires may require the full 20 minutes or more.

- Use a cast-iron skillet if you don't have a campfire.

- Use heavy-duty foil; bring an extra piece or two just in case.

SKILLET FAJITAS

INGREDIENTS

The marinade

2 Tbsps	lime juice (from one lime)
2 Tbsps	olive oil
2	garlic cloves, minced
1 1/2 tsps	chili powder
1 tsp	smoked paprika
1 tsp	ground cumin
1/2 tsp	dried oregano
1/8 cup	cilantro, coarsely chopped
	Black pepper
1/2 tsp	kosher salt

The fajitas and toppings

1 lb	boneless skinless chicken thighs, chicken breast, or flank steak, sliced into chunks or strips
2	bell peppers (mix of colors), sliced
1/2	red onion, sliced
2 Tbsps	olive oil, divided
4	large flour tortillas
	Precooked rice and beans (like canned black beans), prepared at home and warmed at the campsite
	Shredded cheese
	Salsa
	Hot sauce
	Sour cream
	Avocado or guacamole
	Lime wedges
	Fresh cilantro

This sizzling one-skillet meal brings big flavor and energy to your campsite. Marinated protein paired with colorful peppers and onions creates a satisfying dinner that cooks quickly over a fire or campstove. Serve with warmed tortillas and your favorite toppings for a customizable meal that's super-satisfying after a day in the great outdoors — and you'll have leftovers for the next day's breakfast burritos (see page 23).

Serves 4

INSTRUCTIONS

1. At home, combine the marinade ingredients in a zip-top bag, add the meat, seal, and place in your cooler.

2. At the campsite, heat a cast-iron skillet over the fire or on the camp stove until hot, add 1 tablespoon of olive oil.

3. Remove the meat from the marinade, letting any excess marinade drip off. Place in the hot skillet, stirring occasionally until cooked through. Transfer the meat from the skillet to a plate.

4. Add remaining 1 tablespoon of oil to the same skillet, cook peppers and onions until softened but still crisp, about 5 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with salt.

5. Return the meat to the skillet to warm through.

6. Serve with warmed tortillas, rice, beans, and your favorite toppings.

NOTES

- Sliced portobello mushrooms make for a great meaty meatless substitute. They can be marinated ahead of time, or just tossed with the marinade right before cooking.

- Reserve some of the fajita filling for next morning's breakfast burritos.

CAMPFIRE BREAKFAST BURRITOS

These burritos make perfect use of the leftovers from foil packets or fajitas. Depending on the amount of leftovers, you could even skip the eggs.

Serves 2

INGREDIENTS

1 Tbsp	butter or oil
	Leftover meat and vegetables from foil packets or fajitas
2–4	eggs, beaten
1/2 cup	shredded cheese, divided
2	large flour tortillas
	Salsa
	Hot sauce to taste
	Avocado or guacamole

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat skillet over campfire or camp stove. Add butter or oil and leftovers to warm through, about 2 minutes.

2. Pour beaten eggs over the mixture. Cook, stirring frequently, until eggs are set. Remove from heat, stir in half the cheese.

3. Serve in warmed tortillas and top with remaining cheese, salsa, hot sauce, avocado, or whatever add-ins you prefer.

Full-Meal *Salads*

These crunchy, colorful, fresh entrée salads are perfect to slip into a springtime meal repertoire.

Recipes and photos by *Vanessa Seder*

I used as much in-season spring produce as possible when developing these recipes. Eating produce that's picked at its prime and grown locally means better quality and taste, and ultimately is better for the planet.

In my view, what transforms a salad into a full meal is less about portion size than the ingredients used. Bulking salads up with plant-based protein (beans, nuts, seeds), animal-based protein (I used fish here), and/or whole grains (complex carbohydrates high in fiber) helps to leave you feeling satiated longer. These salads provide a balance of different textures and flavors, juxtaposing hot and cold, crunchy and chewy, pickled and fresh, which makes them fun and interesting to eat.

ROASTED CAULIFLOWER SALAD

WITH KALE, DATES, AND PEPITAS, IN A LEMON VINAIGRETTE

Serves 4

This hearty salad stars two members of the cruciferous family, rich in antioxidants and phytonutrients: cauliflower and kale. The roasted cauliflower adds a nutty flavor that pairs delightfully with the sweetness of dates and crunch of pepitas.

INGREDIENTS

2	2-lb heads of cauliflower, leaves and core removed cut into 2-inch florets (about 12 cups)
1/2 cup	plus 1 Tbsp olive oil, divided
1 3/4 tsp	fine sea salt, divided
1 tsp	freshly ground black pepper, divided
3 Tbsps	fresh lemon juice
1 tsp	thinly sliced Fresno chili or more to taste
2	sweet apples such as Gala or Honeycrisp apples, chopped (2 cups)
4 cups	baby kale
1/3 cup	toasted, salted pepitas
1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley sprigs
4	chopped pitted medjool dates

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 425° F. Place the cauliflower florets on a parchment-lined standard-sized baking sheet. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon olive oil and season with 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper.

2. Spread out and roast the cauliflower, tossing once halfway through cooking, until it is browned in spots and cooked through, about 40 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk together the lemon juice, chili, 1/2 cup olive oil, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Add the apple and toss to coat in the dressing.

4. Once the cauliflower has finished roasting, add the cauliflower to the bowl with the apple along with the kale, pepitas, parsley, and dates. Serve warm or room temperature.

PAN-ROASTED SALMON
OVER RADISH, ORANGE, AND SHAVED FENNEL SALAD

Hot, sizzling, crisp-skinned salmon over a bed of cold, crisp, sweet, tangy, savory, and slightly bitter vegetables and fruit delivers a perfect balance of elements in this sunny-hued salad.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

3	navel oranges, peeled and thinly sliced crosswise into rounds
1/4 cup	fresh orange juice
1/2 tsp	fresh orange zest
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
1 tsp	Turbinado sugar
5 Tbsps	olive oil, divided
1 1/4 tsp	fine sea salt, divided
1 tsp	freshly ground black pepper, divided
2 cups	sliced radishes such as Breakfast, Globe, and Watermelon
2	large fennel bulbs, thinly sliced (3 cups)
2 cups	torn radicchio
1/2 cup	fennel fronds
4	4- to 6-oz pieces skin-on, center-cut wild caught salmon, about 1-inch thick

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Arrange the oranges evenly among 4 plates. Set aside.

2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the orange juice, orange zest, mustard, and sugar. Slowly drizzle in 4 tablespoons of olive oil while whisking to combine. Season with 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper.

3. Add the radishes, fennel, and radicchio to the dressing and toss well to coat. Divide the salad among the 4 plates with the orange slices.

4. Season the salmon with 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a large cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium heat swirling to coat the oil. Add the salmon to the skillet and cook skin-side down without moving until crisp, about 4 minutes. Gently flip over with a spatula and continue to cook until cooked through and golden brown in parts, about 3 more minutes.

5. Place one piece of salmon on top of each of the 4 plates. Drizzle any remaining dressing over the salmon and serve.

FARRO SALAD

WITH CHICKPEAS, ASPARAGUS, AVOCADO, WALNUTS, PRESERVED LEMONS, AND HERBS

Whole grains, chickpeas, and walnuts do the heavy lifting in this plant-based, protein-packed salad. A sweet and briny pickled-lemon dressing adds a hit of brightness.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	farro, rinsed and drained
3 tsps	fine sea salt, divided
8 Tbsps	olive oil, divided
1	1-lb bunch thick-stemmed asparagus, tough ends trimmed
1/2 cup	raw walnut halves
1 1/2 cups	chickpeas (either cooked from dried chickpeas or canned chickpeas, drained, rinsed, then drained again)
1	avocado, ripe but firm, halved, pitted and peeled, and coarsely chopped
1/2 cup	flat-leaf parsley leaves and tender stems
1/4 cup	chopped scallions
1 Tbsp	finely chopped **preserved lemon peel**
1 Tbsp	juice from the preserved lemons
1/2 tsp	finely chopped garlic
1 tsp	honey
1 tsp	freshly ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium saucepan, combine the farro, 4 cups water, and 2 teaspoons salt. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce the heat to medium, and simmer until the farro is cooked through but lightly chewy, 20 to 25 minutes. Drain well and rinse under cold water to cool, then drain again and transfer to a large bowl.

2. Meanwhile, heat a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and the asparagus and cook, turning with tongs occasionally until browned in parts, but still crisp tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer the asparagus to a cutting board and cut crosswise into 1-inch pieces. Add to the bowl with the farro.

3. Return the skillet to the stovetop over medium-high heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and the walnuts, and cook, stirring constantly, until toasted and almost charred in parts, about 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board and roughly chop, then add the walnuts to the bowl with the asparagus and farro.

4. Add the chickpeas, avocado, parsley, and scallions to the bowl.

5. In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon peel, juice, garlic, honey, remaining 6 tablespoons olive oil, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper. Pour the dressing all over the salad and toss gently to coat in the dressing.

Destination: San Antonio

A Mecca for Plant-Based Texas Dining

SHUTTERSTOCK

These memorable vegan eateries are worth the trip.

Story and photos by *Teresa Bergen*

San Antonio's vegan scene surprised me with its accessibility and variety. During my visit in December 2024, I never seemed far away from something good to eat.

These four restaurants and restaurateurs impressed me with their ethical commitment to the food they serve. All took a chance in the notoriously volatile and low-margin dining world by following their convictions and opening their restaurants. Plus, I want to eat at all of these places again.

PHARM TABLE

Ten years ago, Elizabeth Johnson quit her steady job teaching Latin American cooking at the Culinary Institute of America to open Pharm Table. The concept — Ayurvedic food as medicine, but with a Texas spin on things — is pretty out-there for San Antonio. But the restaurant has already lasted a decade, offering unusual dishes that draw from India and Latin America, while incorporating superfoods and fermentation.

"Pharm Table is the conduit that I use to try to heal people with food," Elizabeth tells me as she sits on the patio one December evening, staying warm by an outdoor heater. "And try to raise awareness about food waste and treating the Earth in a better way. Working directly with regenerative farmers and really trying to reduce our carbon footprint."

You won't find dairy or gluten at Pharm Table. "I'm trying to reduce the major culprits of inflammation in the modern diet," she says. "So I just focus on plants and then clean, sustainably sourced animal proteins."

I tried things I'd never had before here, such as a dandelion cappuccino and an ice cream sandwich made with black tahini mesquite chocolate chip cookies and coconut mesquite gelato (more please). Elizabeth's pineapple-sweetened molé sauce over sweet potato and mushrooms was a standout. I appreciated the wellness section of the drink menu, with mocktails like an aloe-rita and many fresh juices.

Elizabeth is serious about combating food waste, diverting many ingredients from the compost. She juices collard stems to add to green curry and repurposes turmeric and ginger pulp for ceviche. Water left over from roasting beets is used to flavor rice, and beet scraps find their way into beet bordelaise.

This year Pharm Table is expanding into the San Antonio airport, which is going to improve airport dining by 1000%.

"So in a Hispanic diet, it's potatoes, jalapeños, tomato, onion. Those are the only veggies that you know."

– Sofia Renteria, who recalls being mystified the first time she saw an artichoke in real life

A jackfruit quesadilla at Plantaqueria.

Dishes from Pharm Table.

COURTESY OF PHARM TABLE

PLANTAQUERIA

Plantaqueria is one of the more delicious things to spring from the Covid pandemic. Sofia Renteria started in 2020 by making vegan tamales in her apartment and selling them on Instagram. That led to a few pop-ups, and then a brick-and-mortar location in 2023. The bright and cheery fuchsia and yellow walls remind me of Mexico, and the restaurant's downtown location by the Alamo makes it a good lunch spot for sightseers to rest their weary feet.

"We try to do a lot of south Texas favorites, but all plant-based, of course," Sofia tells me while taking a break after the lunch rush. Customers love her La Lucha breakfast tacos, made with soy chorizo and vegan egg and cheese. My jackfruit barbacoa quesadilla was satisfying after a morning of biking between missions.

"I grew up cooking," she says. "I was a girl in a Hispanic family, so that's just expected of you." When she started to eat plant-based, she adapted traditional recipes. But it took a while for her family to understand her new way of eating. “There was a lot of making fun of me at first.” I nodded — I’m frequently the butt of my own family’s tofu-phobic jokes. “I grew up with very few vegetables, right? So in a Hispanic diet, it’s potatoes, jalapeños, tomato, onion. Those are the only veggies that you know.” She recalls being mystified the first time she saw an artichoke in real life.

Sofia has seen the demand for plant-based food in San Antonio grow over the last few years. And she’s thrilled when relatives now ask her to bring Plantaqueria food to family gatherings. “That’s really why we exist — to show people what vegan food can be.”

Beefless strips and kale salad at Green.

GREEN VEGETARIAN CUISINE

“When we opened in 2007, we were the only show in town,” Mike Behrend tells me as we sit at a table at Green Vegetarian Cuisine, San Antonio’s first vegan restaurant. It has a casual diner feel and is known for a big menu that offers both healthy dishes and vegan junk food, as Mike calls it. But even his top-selling take on a chicken-fried steak — a regional favorite he makes with Beyond meat — is a little healthier by replacing the usual fried okra side dish with kale salad. A light and crispy eggplant parmigiana and burritos made with beefless strips and doused in Korean sauce are two other signature dishes. Then there are the pan-sized cinnamon rolls. I brought one home in my carry-on and could barely lift my bag into the luggage rack.

Mike has spent his whole life working in restaurants. In 2005, after seeing a dog get hit by a car, he became a vegetarian. “It just reminded me how precious life is, even for animals,” he says. He no longer wanted to cook and serve animals in a restaurant. Religious and stewardship reasons supported his commitment. “It’s definitely better for the environment,” he says. “And it’s not good for you whatever your beliefs are to continue doing something that you know is bad.”

Opening San Antonio’s first vegetarian restaurant was a leap of faith. It hasn’t always been easy, but Green Vegetarian Cuisine has been in business for 18 years. And some of San Antonio’s newer veg restaurateurs got their start by working for Mike.

HASH VEGAN EATERY

After a sometimes-rough childhood, brothers Roger and Mike Sanchez both cleaned up their acts and got sober. The introspection and mindfulness of their recovery led to an interest in vegetarianism and animal welfare as they considered the interconnectedness of all species. Mike was partially inspired to give up meat because of his young son’s love of herbivorous dinosaurs. In 2020, they opened HASH (Heal and Spread Healing), a vegan restaurant and sober bar serving San Antonio’s mostly Latino and not-so-affluent South Side.

“I remember being really annoyingly loud about my lifestyle and drinking and using drugs and stuff like that,” Roger tells me as I sit with the brothers in their restaurant on a Monday afternoon. The stacks of board games and mishmash of artwork make it feel like we’re

ABUSE
AWAKE
DENVER
Roger and Mike Sanchez at HASH.

hanging out in a cozy clubhouse. “And then what happens a lot in recovery is people want to be like, real reserved and stuff, which is fine. But I’m a very loud and outgoing-type person. So in recovery, I wasn’t going to change that. Recovery saved my life. I’m not going to be shy about it.” A portrait of their beloved mother, Cynthia Ann Sanchez, hangs over the door. She died of cirrhosis and her sons work to keep her memory alive.

This loud approach to recovery led them to open the bright blue and pink HASH on South Flores Street, the main corridor leading to the South Side. HASH Vegan Eatery serves as a community center. It hosts regular game nights, clothes drives, and dollar taco nights to clothe, feed, and bring people together in an uplifting atmosphere.

And the food is really good, too. The Sanchez brothers draw on their careers in hospitality, including a stint at Green Vegetarian Cuisine. HASH’s menu includes waffles, wraps, sandwiches, breakfast burritos, and Mexican specialties. “One of my biggest compliments I ever get is when the little Mexican grandmas come in here just because it’s a restaurant,” Roger says. “They try my pozole, and they’re like, oh, that’s so good. They don’t even know that it’s vegan.” I concur with the Mexican grandmas. That is some darn good pozole.

Pozole at HASH.

HONORARY MENTIONS

The plant-based eating doesn’t stop with these four restaurants. Many places in San Antonio have healthy and/or vegan options. A few more favorites during my stay included Vegan Avenue, with good salads and veg Mexican food, the massively sugar-filled cinnamon rolls at all-vegan Cinnaholic, and Revolucion for juices and smoothie bowls.

DETOX SEED TEA

Recipe by *Elizabeth Johnson of Pharm Table*

SHUTTERSTOCK

After making tea, the seeds can be recycled in stocks and bone broth. Read more about cardamom (page 32).

Makes 2 quarts dry tea

INGREDIENTS

2 cups	cumin seeds
2 cups	coriander seeds
2 cups	fennel seeds
12	cardamom pods

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Dry toast each seed individually on the stove top.

2. Place the toasted seeds into a container and cool.

3. To make, steep in hot water for 3 minutes.

NOTES

- Dry tea keeps for 60 days in a sealed glass container.

SQUASH COCONUT MOQUECA

Recipe by *Elizabeth Johnson of Pharm Table*

COURTESY OF PHARM TABLE

Soups are a great way for us to use trim in the restaurant. We can go through a pile of veggies that are reserved for stock and usually come up with enough ingredients to make a soup.

Serves 5

INGREDIENTS

1/2	yellow onion, julienne
1 Tbsp	minced fresh ginger
1 Tbsp	minced fresh turmeric
1/4 cup	unsweetened coconut flakes, plus more for garnish
2 qts	water, divided
2 cups	seasonal squash, roughly chopped (peel if using winter squash)
1 cup	sweet potato, steamed, skin removed
	Himalayan salt, to taste
	Lemon or lime juice, to taste
	Toasted pepitas, for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Using an electric pressure cooker, sauté the onion, ginger, turmeric, and coconut flakes with 1 cup of the water until soft. Add the squash, sweet potato, and remaining water.

2. Pressure cook on manual setting for 8 minutes. Release the steam and allow it to cool.

3. Blend the ingredients from the pressure cooker until smooth. Season with salt and lemon or lime juice to taste.

4. Garnish with toasted pepita seeds and unsweetened coconut flakes, and serve warm.

WHAT DOES CLIMATE CHANGE MEAN FOR Cardamom?

Regenerative farming may help preserve the "Queen of Spices."

Harvesting cardamom seed pods.

COURTESY OF NELIXIA

Sorting cardamom seed pods.

COURTESY OF DIASPORA CO.

By *Caroline Saunders*

Your spice drawer is no stranger to the impacts of climate change. One of the most affected is the minty-spicy star of chai, kheer, Swedish buns, and so much more: cardamom.

In the largest two cardamom-producing countries, India and Guatemala, the spice has faced withering drought and intensifying extreme weather, making it scarcer and more expensive. So what's in store for this mainstay of sweet and savory dishes alike? And can the "Queen of Spices" be climate-proofed?

The cardamom I sprinkle into the dough to make Cardamom Snap Cookies (see page 35) comes from the ground-up, dried fruits of the perennial green cardamom plant, which is **native** to the Western Ghats mountain range of southern India and thrives there and in other tropical and subtropical climes.

Rather like vanilla, cardamom is produced on a relatively small scale globally, largely by **smallholder farmers**. It's the **third-most expensive** spice in the world, after saffron and vanilla, and the industry is **marked by big price swings**. And that's before you factor in climate change as a threat multiplier.

In 2020, a duo of powerful hurricanes swept through the hilly, cardamom-producing region of Guatemala, which is the world's biggest exporter, deluging fields. The harvest that year was **negatively impacted**, though the effects paled in comparison to those of extreme heat in 2023 and drought in 2024, according to Elisa Aragon, co-founder of the Guatemala-based ingredients company **Nelixia**, which sells cardamom. The heat and drought halted flower development on cardamom plants, and **combined with damage by pests** to cut production by **nearly half** for the current season.

Those impacts over the last two years have tripled Guatemalan cardamom prices, Elisa says, and are the first time that "the crisis of prices is because of climate change." She added that Nelixia had to increase its cardamom prices, which kept some of their usual customers from buying.

Indian cardamom has also felt the heat. Sana Javeri Kadri, the founder and

Cardamom plants. Inset, a handful of freshly harvested cardamom pods.

COURTESY OF DIASPORA CO.

COURTESY OF NELIXIA

Across the world, farmers and researchers are employing a range of methods to try to protect cardamom from extreme weather.

CEO of the single-origin spice company **Diaspora Co.**, says that "cardamom has been my problem child for a long time," because of a succession of climate impacts at the three regenerative farms from which the company sources. After yields at their first partner farm in Kerala declined because of heat and unseasonal rain, Diaspora Co. began sourcing from a farm in Tamil Nadu, but then flash floods hit the Tamil Nadu farm two years ago, cratering two years of harvests. Last spring, the company added a third farm in the region into the mix; but so far, the combined climate impacts have kept Diaspora Co. from having as much cardamom as it had expected.

These are industry-wide problems in India. Last year, a historic drought hit Kerala, where **60%** of the country's cardamom is grown, **halving production** in the state.

Across the world, farmers and researchers are employing a range of methods to try to protect cardamom from extreme weather. Last year, the Indian Spices board, a government group, **released a drought-tolerant variety** for farmers to begin growing. Sana says, "It could be incredibly helpful long-term," though she estimates it'll take a decade or more before it's adopted widely.

In the meantime, farmers are coming up with their own adaptive measures. Elisa says in Guatemala, planting cardamom at higher elevations to escape rising temperatures is one element of an ongoing "evolution in how to handle the crop." Another is the use of regenerative farming practices such as agroforestry, which can **offer resilience** against drought, heat, and floods. Nelixia has been supporting a transition to regenerative techniques for five years at some of the farms it sources from, and last year's drought cut the cardamom harvest there by a relatively spare 30%, compared to 80% at neighboring monoculture farms, she says.

Similar trends have played out at the regenerative farms Diaspora Co. works with. When last year's drought in Kerala hit Abraham Chacko's farm, he lost just a fifth of his cardamom harvest, compared to larger losses at other conventional farms in the region, and almost all of his plants survived. His farm **mimics a natural forest** by incorporating layers of plants around the cardamom, and is planted with a variety of the spice that he bred from the hardiest seedlings for pest resistance and an ambrosial aroma reminiscent of **licorice, mint, pine, and pomelo**. After the drought last year, he wrote in a message, it was clear that his variety "proved to be climate-resilient, too."

Regenerative farming methods can blunt the effects of warming on chai's linchpin spice, but their use in the cardamom industry today is still the exception rather than the rule. Elisa says the companies involved in the cardamom supply chain between the farm and the grocery store — small ones, like hers, and big buyers of ingredients — need to help finance the transition. When that happens, she says, "the value of creating this resilience is going to be divided by everyone."

See more from this series: ***Learn what climate change means for maple syrup.***

SPICED ORANGE-PINEAPPLE SMOOTHIE

Recipe by *Nicki Miller* **Photo by** *Justin McChesney-Wachs*

I love this variation on orange juice. The whole fruits provide fiber, and the pineapple makes it a nicely frothy (but thin) smoothie. A little cardamom goes a long way, and adjust the cayenne based on your tolerance for spice. This is ideal with a savory breakfast.

Serves 2–4

INGREDIENTS

2	oranges, peeled and seeds removed
1 cup	frozen pineapple
1 cup	water
Pinch	of cardamom
Pinch	of cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a blender, put oranges, pineapple, water, cardamom, and cayenne and run on high until smooth.

2. Pour in glasses, and enjoy while cold and frothy.

CARDAMOM SNAP COOKIES

Recipe and photo by
Caroline Saunders

These simple cookies are an ode to cardamom, the dough subtly infused with the warm-bright-fruitiness of the spice, and the drizzle of glaze heady with its perfume. A 2 1/4-inch round or flute-edged cookie or biscuit cutter works well, but slightly smaller or larger is fine — just notch the bake time up or down a tad, accordingly. Serve with coffee, for dessert, or for an afternoon snack.

Makes about 30 cookies

INGREDIENTS

The dough

1 1/2	sticks unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 cup	sugar
1/2 tsp	salt
3/4 tsp	ground cardamom
1/2 tsp	vanilla
	Zest of 1/2 lemon
1	egg
2 3/4 cups	all-purpose flour

The glaze

1/2 cup	powdered sugar
1 Tbsp	lemon juice
1/2 tsp	ground cardamom

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, mix together the butter, sugar, salt, cardamom, vanilla, and lemon zest at medium speed until well combined, scraping down the sides as needed.

2. Add the egg and mix again until well combined, scraping down the sides as needed.

3. Add the flour and mix again on low speed just until well combined, being careful not to over mix.

4. Divide the dough into two flat discs (to make chilling faster and rolling easier), wrap each in plastic wrap, and refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes.

5. Preheat the oven to 350˚F and line a sheet pan with parchment paper or a silicone mat.

6. Unwrap one disc and place it between two sheets of parchment paper. Using a rolling pin, roll the dough to a thickness of 1/4 inch. Using a 2 1/4-inch round cookie cutter, stamp out cookies and transfer to the prepared sheet pan. Firm the cookies back up by chilling them in the fridge or freezer for 10 minutes, then bake them for 7 to 11 minutes, or until the edges just begin to turn light golden. Gather the scraps and re-roll. Repeat with the second disc and the cookie scraps. Transfer baked cookies to a cooling rack and allow to cool to room temperature.

7. While cookies cool, mix the powdered sugar, lemon juice, and cardamom in a small bowl with a fork or a whisk until smooth. Drizzle a small amount over each cookie.

See page 31 for a tea that uses cardamom pods.

Stinging Nettles:

AN UNSUNG SPRINGTIME FOOD

Get out and forage — just wear gloves!

SHUTTERSTOCK

Story, recipes, and photos by *Caroline Sörbom*

A few months ago, I texted my sister a link to a post written by Julia Sherman, a vegetable-loving, New York-based cookbook author, chef, and multimedia artist we both turn to for inspiration in the kitchen.

"Omg!!" I wrote, "Julia Sherman fed her baby puréed stinging nettles as their first meal!!" The extra exclamation points reflected how excited I was, because ever since I first learned to forage them, I have loved including nettles in my springtime vegetable rotation. I often surprise guests and delight myself by serving the cooked leaves with fresh peas on top of polenta (see page 43), or tucked into a cheesy quiche.

Nettles are a nutritious, abundant, and versatile green. As someone who enjoys them, I found it validating to read that the *very cool* Sherman (called a "culinary impresario" by *The New Yorker*) felt strongly enough about the herbaceous perennial that she chose to spoon it into her baby's mouth as their first encounter with real food.

It might seem like bad parenting to feed a child food with the word "stinging" in the name (in fact, the generic name for the species, *Urtica*, comes from the Latin word *uro*, "I burn"), but the tiny trichomes on the stems and leaves, which carry a fluid rich in histamine, acetylcholine (a neurotransmitter), and serotonin, fully deactivate when cooked; only when raw do the trichomes "sting" bare skin. Understandably, this natural defense system of the plant is enough to turn people off, even though nettles grow abundantly in most areas of the world and even though stings can be easily prevented by wearing gloves.

> I seek out nettles to rejuvenate me after a long, dark New England winter, but I also look forward to their unique taste and texture.

A Famous Wild Edible

Jamie Oliver, a British chef and food celebrity who has helped to popularize foraging in Great Britain by posting recipes with easily identified wild edibles, once wrote to his followers on social media, saying, "People might think eating stinging nettles is weird, but folks have enjoyed them for millennia." But in this millennium, when most people have access to bagged greens that don't burn one's bare hands, lovers of nettles have to prove that they are worthy of the same grace given to other vexatious foods such as artichokes, whose sharp, leaf-top barbs need to be tediously removed; or rhubarb, whose stalks are edible, but whose leaves are poisonous.

To embrace nettles as a food worthy of preparation, it's crucial to understand the plant as medicinal, because part of the pleasure of eating it comes from knowing that it's good for you. Herbal tea was my first introduction to prepared nettles. My mother, who boiled the deep green, mildly earthy, and grassy-tasting tonic on the stove and strained it into Mason jars, encouraged me to drink it after I endured a nasty illness in my early 20s. The drink helped nurture my revival, and when I caught Covid-19 in the spring of 2020, I drank it then, too.

Steve Brill, a world-renowned naturalist, forager, and educator, describes the taste of nettle tea as uniquely special: "It's one of my favorites. It doesn't taste like normal tea — not bitter, spicy, minty, or lemony. It's more like a strong stock of rich, deep, green plant essence, and it's one of the most nourishing drinks of all. Whenever I feel run down, tired, or even irritable, I make myself some."

Because of its potent pharmacological effects, the nettle plant has been used as a natural remedy for ailments for more than 2,000 years, including for hay fever management and joint pain. The Abenaki peoples of the Northeast used dried and powdered leaves to treat nosebleeds, and the Sioux used stinging nettle tea to treat urinary issues and benign prostatic hyperplasia (uses that were also common in Europe). However, it was not until the turn of the century that nettles' medicinal potential was thoroughly evaluated by western science. Unsurprisingly, scientists have found that nettles demonstrate the same bodily healing effects that herbalists have known about for millennia.

Healthy Stats

Many of the benefits of the plant are due to the high levels of minerals it contains, especially calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium, phosphorus, manganese, silica, iodine, silicon, sodium, and sulfur. For being such an inconspicuous plant, its nutritional value is astounding. Rachel Diak, an herbalist based in Claremont, New Hampshire, calls nettles one of her favorites, and says that she finds it funny that so many people purchase magnesium supplements when they could get all the magnesium they need by sipping nettle tea for free. And a cup of cooked nettles contains more calcium (a mineral essential for bone health) than a glass of milk.

Nettles are also a good source of vitamin A, beta carotene, and B-complex vitamins, as well as chlorophyll and tannins. A 100-gram serving of cooked nettle leaves supplies 100% of the daily requirement of vitamin A. And a whooping 26% of nettles' calories come from protein — more than any other vegetable. Rachel says that while the histamines in nettles help the body handle inflammation, the nutrients "just sort of fill the reserves of the body," and allow those who take them to "take care of themselves on an emotional level." A win-win.

Investigating the benefits of consuming the entire nettle plant (as opposed to only the leaves), food scientists have found that it provides additional benefits, particularly to the gut.

Nettles are happiest growing in disturbed (not cultivated) soil, making them more likely to propagate without help. They don't need pesticides or fertilizers to reach full potential (as many commercial crops do).

When I caught Covid, I drank nettle tea.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Dr. Diana Obanda, assistant professor in Nutrition and Food Science at the University of Maryland, uses mice and cultured cells to test the health benefits of eating nettles. Her research has found that doing so reduces the risk of obesity in mice and suggests that, for humans, consuming nettles can positively impact the bacteria in the gut microbiome and protect us from obesity and diseases associated with it. Because of nettles' nutrients and positive effects on the gut microbiome, Dr. Obanda states that "the stinging nettle is a poster child for healthy food."

Tasty Eats

But to fully embrace nettles as a wild edible, it's important to think of them as a pleasurable food as well as a "healthy food." I seek out nettles to rejuvenate me after a long, dark New England winter, but I also look forward to their unique taste and texture. They are a food that I enjoy cooking with.

In terms of taste, properly prepared nettles taste different from nettle tea, because they include the protein structure of the plant. I would compare cooked nettles to a mild spinach, but they're grassier and slightly bitter. They are also hearty and have a thick mouthfeel. Many people who are new to cooking with nettles make the mistake of boiling them; the best way to prepare raw nettles is to steam them (see page 43), which brings out their natural sweetness and doesn't make their texture slimy; sautéing them also works well.

When explaining why she fed her baby a purée of stinging nettles, Julia Sherman didn't speak to the nettle's nutritional value. Instead, she emphasized their bitter vegetable-like taste, something she wanted her baby to experience and learn to enjoy the way she did. "Bitter was an important thing for me," she was quoted as saying in a New Yorker article, "because I feel like that's a really crucial end of the culinary spectrum that some people are just not into."

I loved that Sherman brought nettles into a broader discussion about the American palate and what foods we are accustomed to liking. As babies, we are born with a propensity toward sweetness, which sticks with us as we age. To learn to enjoy bitter foods, many of us either need repeated exposure to a bitter food, or need to progressively enjoy it in association with something that is better liked. I, for instance, still cannot eat radicchio alone. But when it's paired in a salad with butternut squash, or dressed with a sweet, balsamic glaze, I adore it. Nettles are in a similar category, and it's essential to treat them as you would other slightly bitter vegetables and flavor, pair, and season them appropriately.

Gloves are a must when foraging for nettles.

DOUG MINDELL

Global Versatility

People worldwide who appreciate nettles have incorporated them into their own cuisines and learned to properly cook them. In Central Italy, where stinging nettles are widely foraged and consumed, people use them in omelets, soups, and pasta dishes. Another standard preparation includes sautéing them on the stovetop with peppers. Inhabitants of Gorbeialdea, a region in Spanish Basque Country, routinely enjoy stewed nettles in their omelets as well. In Ireland, where nettles grow everywhere in the spring, nettle soup is a seasonal special in pubs and lodges, enhanced with cream and potatoes.

Recently, Eastern Europe has seen a revival of historical food and folk customs, including foraging for edibles. One of my favorite ways to use nettles comes from Polish Chef Zuza Zak, who coats the leaves in a beer and chickpea flour batter and fries them in oil on the stovetop (see page 42). In this preparation, the stingers on the leaves enhance the recipe, because the batter clings to the tiny trichomes, making them sturdy, crisp, and absolutely delectable, while the cooking neutralizes the sting itself.

My sister (the one who received my excited message about stinging nettle baby food) developed a taste for nettles when her fieldwork as a geologist took her to Nepal's Himalayas, where nettles pop up even in high altitudes. The Nepalis have many names for nettles, the most common being sisnu. Traditionally, sisnu is made into a soup known as satuk, which is flavored with warm spices such as black pepper and ginger and sometimes other ingredients such as stock, honey, and milk. Next door in Tibet, folklore states that the beloved Bodhisattva Milarepa, an 11th-century hermit, poet, and Tibetan Buddhist cultural hero, survived for years on nothing but cooked nettles. They say he became green and attained enlightenment.

No Farming Required

I am not a spiritual expert, but eating nettles in pursuit of enlightenment seems a valid notion, because, environmentally speaking, nettles' existence supports ecological harmony. Nettles are happiest growing in disturbed (not cultivated) soil, making them more likely to propagate without help. They don't need pesticides or fertilizers to reach full potential (as many commercial crops do). Whereas spinach, for example, requires land and irrigation for cultivation which can negatively impact biodiversity and local ecosystems, nettles add iron and minerals to the soil and fertilize and replenish neighboring plants. They also provide housing for 40 species of insects and are the primary food source for the caterpillars of several butterfly species. For a conscious consumer like me, all of this adds to the food's appeal.

I am excited about the various ways I see nettles being used as food in the United States. North American Indigenous peoples historically embraced nettles for medicinal and textile use, and many consumed it as a cooked green. In some tribes, the tradition of using nettles lives on, but in new ways that address the health challenges of the 21st century. In Washington state, the Tulalip Tribes' Hibulb Cultural Center hosts a "Rediscovery Program" in which participants harvest nettles from the tribal forestlands each spring and use them to make tea, flavored lemonade, pesto, and a diabetic-friendly version of buckskin bread called "Hibulb bread," which uses ground nettles as a baked-in seasoning in lieu of sugar and salt.

Nettles' use as a seasoning is also on the rise. Recently, while browsing for some goodies at my local cheese shop, I came across crackers baked by Frog Hollow Farmstead in Castleton, Vermont. The baker finished the rustic crackers with a dusting of ground-up dried nettles and salt. I was delighted to see this rare inclusion of nettles into a commercial food product, and even more delighted when I tasted the crackers, which were delicious.

Foraging for Nettles

If I've convinced you to give nettles a try, I encourage you to put on gloves, long pants, and long sleeves, and go foraging. Springtime is a great time to

Nettles are so delicious and can be eaten in so many ways. I encourage you to put on gloves, long pants, and long sleeves, and go foraging. Springtime is a great time to look because that's when the new growth sprouts up.

A basket full of nettles, guarded by my cat.

look, because that's when the new growth sprouts up. It's important to harvest plants when they are young and haven't yet flowered, when they contain more nutrients and are less bitter. Rachel Diak (the herbalist) told me that foraging younger leaves is ideal because the older plants contain compounds that can be hard on the kidneys. You can freeze or dry unused nettles to use throughout the year.

Nettles prefer rich soil with large amounts of nitrogen, so look for them in disturbed habitats — land or soil near human habitation that hasn't been trampled — such as moist woodlands, thickets, along rivers, on partially shaded trails, even grown-over vacant lots. Sometimes they can be confused with catnip, but their sting and lack of aroma will give them away. In the city, you might find them in the corners of rehabilitated green spaces. Nettles are perennials, so once you identify a patch, you can keep going back every year to look for young growth. To harvest, wear gloves and use scissors to clip the leaves from the stems. I like to collect them in a basket, which makes me feel timeless, or in a brown paper bag, which does a good job of preventing accidental stinging.

> Lovers of nettles have to prove that they are worthy of the same grace given to other vexatious foods such as artichokes, whose sharp, leaf-top barbs need to be tediously removed; or rhubarb, whose stalks are edible, but whose leaves are poisonous.

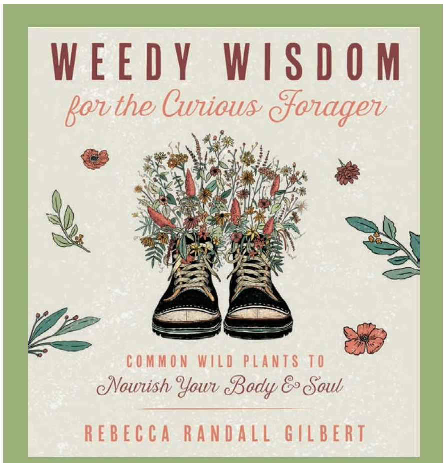
And if you do get stung, I'm here to tell you that the world doesn't end. Some foragers I know even enjoy it! But I wouldn't recommend it. Last spring, when I unexpectedly came across a patch of young nettles, I had no gloves to protect my hands, but I couldn't help myself and stuffed my pockets full of leaves. The buzzing sensation started on my hands a few minutes later, and hours afterward, they still pulsed with a warm, prickly feeling. Tolerable, yes. Desirable, no.

That being said, if you ever find yourself in a similar gloveless situation, consider this: Nettles' stinging quality has been considered a beneficial asset for thousands of years. Urtication, or the beating of one's limbs with stalks of stinging nettle, was used by Indigenous tribes, ancient Egyptians, and other peoples worldwide to relieve painful, arthritic joints, stimulate circulation, and keep warm. Modern science confirms that when the histamine and acetylcholine in the trichomes are injected into tissue, they cause an awakening of cellular responses, lymph flow, and nerve and capillary stimulation. So if the leaves do sting you, they might even be doing you some good

Cooking With Nettles

When planning a menu around nettles, think of using intense flavors that balance out the earthy greens. Consider cheeses like Asiago, Jack, Parmesan and sharp Cheddars. Include alliums like leeks and garlic; herbs such as thyme, marjoram, dill, and parsley; and spices such as black pepper, chilies, nutmeg, and ginger. You can also try nettles with acidic components such as mustard, lemon, lime, and wine vinegars, or, if you eat them, smoked meats or fish. Substituting cooked nettles in classic dishes such as spanakopita, ravioli, or eggs Florentine is also a good bet.

When embraced as they are, nettles offer endless possibilities. In Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, chef Sabina Osmanović dreamed of a fine-dining restaurant that would "pay respect" to the nettle, which she felt had been "unjustly marginalized" as a wild food. She opened her restaurant and named it Žara iz Duvara (The Singing Nettle.) The menu is entirely devoted to stinging nettles, and almost every dish incorporates them. I am glad that restaurants like this exist and that food influencers like Julia Sherman are feeding nettles to their babies, even if they need a little extra care while handling.



Finding Nettles

- Farmers markets will sometimes have nettles **(such as this one in Brooklyn).**
- You can also grow your own! Check out these **tips from the Gardener's Path.**
- If you're game to forage, whether you live in the city or the country (or somewhere in between), **check out Caroline's guide** to foraging in the Northeast, and pick up some tips for **foraging in Southern California.**
- Massachusetts farmer Rebecca Gilbert has a book about foraging for weeds: ***Weedy Wisdom for the Curious Forager: Common Wild Plants to Nourish Your Body & Soul*** (on Amazon)

CREAMY NETTLE SOUP

WITH POTATO AND WARM SPICES

This delightful nettle-y variation on cream of broccoli soup is similar to versions of satuk, the nettle soup popular in Nepal. It requires quite a bit of nettles, so if you find a lot of them while foraging, this is a great way to use them. You can substitute store-bought spinach for half of the nettles if you can't find enough where you live.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

30 cups	nettles
1 1/2 cups	yellow potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch cubes
1	large yellow onion, medium diced
4	garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1	serrano or jalapeño pepper, thinly sliced (optional)
1 1/2 tsp	freshly grated ginger root
1/2 cup	ghee
1/4 cup	untoasted sesame oil (or a neutral oil such as avocado oil or canola oil)
2 tsps	ground coriander
2 tsps	ground fennel seeds
1 tsp	ground cumin
1 tsp	black pepper
1/2 pod	star anise, ground
1/2 tsp	ground turmeric
5 cups	vegetable stock, plus extra if desired
1 Tbsp	plus 1/4 tsp salt, divided
1 cup	full-fat yogurt, strained
1/3 cup	dill leaves, finely chopped (about 4–5 sprigs)
1 Tbsp	lemon zest
	Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. First, cook the nettles using a waterless steaming method (see page 43).

2. Transfer the cooked greens to a colander and place the colander in the sink or over a bowl, allowing the greens to drain. When the nettles are cool enough to handle, gently squeeze the greens to remove any excess moisture. Chop them in bite-size pieces and set aside.

3. In a large bowl, combine the potatoes, onion, garlic, chili pepper (if using), and ginger. Set aside.

4. Warm the ghee and oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. When they are warm and shimmering, stir in the coriander, fennel, cumin, pepper, star anise, and turmeric. Toast the spices in the fat until they are hot and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Avoid burning.

5. Add the potato-onion mixture to the pan, and gently sauté for 45 minutes or until the potatoes are very soft. Stir occasionally to avoid sticking, turning down the heat if necessary. When finished, the potatoes will easily smash with a wooden spoon.

6. When the potatoes are done cooking, add the vegetable stock and 1 tablespoon of the salt. Increase the heat to high and bring to a simmer. Turn off the heat and let it cool.

7. While the soup stock cools, make the yogurt topping: In a small bowl, combine the yogurt, dill, lemon zest, and pepper. Refrigerate until serving time.

8. When the soup stock mixture is cool enough to handle, combine it with the chopped nettles in a blender (you might have to do this in batches). Blend the mixture until smooth and creamy.

9. Pour the puréed soup back into a pot and warm it to a gentle simmer on the stove. If you like the soup's consistency, leave it. If you would like it thinner, add 1/2 cup of stock at a time and incorporate thoroughly.

10. Add the remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt, or more to taste. Serve the nettle soup warm with dollops of the dill yogurt on top and a grind of pepper.

BEER-BATTERED NETTLE LEAVES

WITH HONEY MUSTARD DIP

I adore this way of preparing nettles. Many greens would collapse under the weight of the batter and oil but the structure of the nettle helps to hold the batter to it. ***Serves 4***

INGREDIENTS

1 Tbsp	honey
1 Tbsp	Dijon mustard
1 Tbsp	olive oil
1 Tbsp	fresh lemon juice (optional)
3/4 cup	(Heaping) chickpea flour
1/4 cup	water, more if needed
1/2 cup	beer (like a lager)
1/4 tsp	celery salt (optional)
15–20	large nettle leaves, rinsed and dried
	Canola oil or grapeseed oil for frying

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make the dipping sauce: In a small bowl whisk together the honey, mustard, olive oil, and lemon juice if using. Set aside.

2. Make the batter: Sift the chickpea flour into a large bowl and whisk in the water. When the water is incorporated, slowly add in the beer, whisking as you go and adding more water as necessary. The batter should have the consistency of heavy cream. Whisk in the celery salt if using.

3. Wearing gloves or using a utensil, add the nettle leaves to the batter, make sure they are coated and let them soak for 5 minutes.

4. While they soak, heat a medium-sized cast-iron skillet over medium heat and add enough oil so that it reaches 1 inch in depth.

5. When the oil is hot enough (a drop of the batter should confidently sizzle when it hits the oil), use tongs to transfer the nettle leaves into the oil and fry for 30 to 45 seconds each side. Depending on the size of your skillet, you may need to do multiple batches.

6. Using tongs, remove the nettles from the oil and drain on a towel-lined plate. Serve warm with the dipping sauce.

Recipe adapted from Zuza Zak.

NETTLE-TOPPED POLENTA

WITH PEAS AND CHÈVRE

Serves 2–4

INGREDIENTS

6 cups	water
1/2 tsp	salt
1 1/2 cups	corn grits
4 Tbsps	olive oil, divided, plus more for serving
	Sea salt to taste
6 cups	nettles
4	garlic cloves, thinly sliced
2	medium leeks, trimmed and thinly sliced
2 cups	English peas (frozen, or freshly shelled and blanched)
8 oz	chèvre, divided
	Juice of 1 lemon, divided
	Zest of 1 lemon
	Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make the polenta: Add the water and salt to a medium pot and bring to a boil over high heat. Slowly pour in the corn grits and whisk constantly until the mixture is boiling again.

2. Once boiling, reduce the heat to low and cook uncovered for 20 to 25 minutes. Continue whisking occasionally to ensure the grits do not stick. When the grits are cooked, turn off the heat and stir in 2 tablespoons of olive oil and salt to taste. Cover and set aside.

3. Next, cook the nettles using a waterless steaming method (see below).

4. In a wide skillet over medium-low heat, warm the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the sliced garlic and cook for 1 minute until fragrant but not browned. Add the leeks and a big pinch of salt and cook for 5 minutes or until softened. Next, add the peas and stir until heated through, about 2 minutes. Add the cooked nettles and stir to incorporate.

5. Turn off the heat and add half the chèvre, half the lemon juice, and the lemon zest. Stir to combine. Taste and season with salt and pepper. If desired, add the remaining lemon juice.

6. To plate, divide the polenta into bowls and top with the nettles, peas, and leeks. Crumble the remaining goat cheese on top along with a drizzle of olive oil and a big twist of black pepper. Serve warm.

SIMPLY SEASONED WATERLESS

STEAMED NETTLES

This is the optimal way to cook nettles over boiling or blanching, which alters the texture. It uses very little water, so it concentrates the flavor and nutrition. Use this method when adding cooked nettles to dishes such as omelets, quiches, pastas, or grain bowls. Nettles cook down like spinach, so double the recipe if necessary.

Serves 1–4

INGREDIENTS

- About 8 cups nettles (or more)
- Olive oil, to taste
- Sesame oil, to taste (optional)
- Lemon juice, to taste
- Salt and freshly ground
- black pepper, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wearing gloves, gather the nettles, rinse them under cool water, and trim any big stems with scissors. Shake off excess water and chop the greens.

2. Place them in a large, heavy-bottom pot, such as a Dutch oven. Do not add any additional water.

3. Cover, and cook on low heat for 5 to10 minutes until totally wilted. Check the greens once or twice and try not to overcook.

4. Add olive oil (and sesame oil, if using), lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Mix and serve warm.

Buransh Flowers and Climate Change

Travelers and locals celebrate the blooming of this edible native of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region.

Story and photos by ***Meenakshi J***

"This year, the buransh blooming is delayed," Vasudha informs me as we walk around the sublime Parvada — a sun-kissed hamlet snuggled away in the Kumaon region of northern India's Uttarakhand state. With fluffy clouds floating around, orchards dotted with fresh blooms of apple and apricot, and lush greenery draped over the South Gola mountain range, the region is sought after by travelers.

My journey here was part exploration, part pilgrimage to the region's ancient Hindu temples. I had chosen to stay at Parvada Bungalows, a boutique property, and its co-founder, Vasudha Sondhi, offered to accompany me on a nearby trail that's carpeted by buransh flowers — also known as rhododendrons, rhodes, or *gurans* — and leads to the hidden horse-shoe-shaped Bhalugaad Waterfall.

In Parvada and other Himalayan villages, the arrival of spring is synonymous with the annual blooming of the buransh — much anticipated by the local communities as they blanket the mountain ranges with vibrant hues of red and pink.

As we walked, it struck me that the buransh is to the Hindu Kush Himalayan region what cherry blossoms are to Japan. The locals view the blooms not just as a seasonal change but as a cultural and culinary celebration.

What's even more fascinating is the ancient lineage of these colorful blooms, which predate the formation of the Himalayas.

While rhododendrons can also be found in the Americas, Europe, and Australia, India and Nepal are home to nearly 120 different varieties. Small wonder, then, that the buransh holds an exalted status — it's the state tree of Uttarakhand and the state flower of Nagaland and Himachal Pradesh. Across the border in Nepal, the *lali gurans*, meaning red rhododendron, takes pride of place as the national flower, underscoring its deep-rooted cultural and ecological significance in the region.

In Parvada and other Himalayan villages, the arrival of spring is synonymous with the annual blooming of the buransh — much anticipated by the local communities as they blanket the mountain ranges with vibrant hues of red and pink.

Referenced in ancient Ayurvedic scriptures as well as culinary texts, rhododendrons are used for therapeutic and medicinal purposes in India. Traditional mountain healers use the leaves of a rhododendron tree to alleviate headaches by making a paste out of it and applying it to the forehead, and its bark is used to cure dysentery, cough, and diarrhea. Meanwhile, a brew of the flowers works wonders for curbing nausea, particularly when accompanied by a loss of appetite. The same brew is administered to address menstrual disorders.

The flower is not just used by traditional medical practitioners, but Himalayan dwellers, too, have been incorporating buransh juice, rhodo tea, and buransh chutney to their diet for their potent antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anti-diabetic properties, especially during the transition from winter to spring.

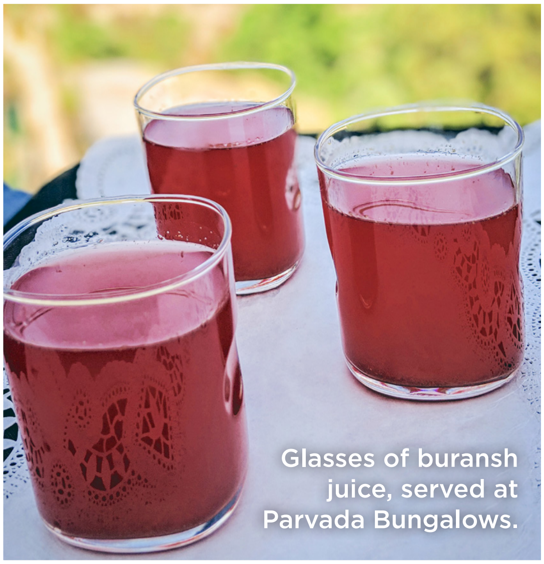
"All varieties of buransh are not edible," Vasudha warns. "Local people only use the deep red ones in their kitchens, while a few varieties of the pink and shades of white here are considered poisonous."

These days, culinary enthusiasts are increasingly incorporating edible buransh, which has made its way into upscale farm-to-fork kitchens in Nepal and India. One such is a delicious and healthy Kumaoni dish (*thali*) which I had a chance to sample at Parvada Bungalows. Prepared by Prakash Chandra, a resident of Parvada and the property's talented cook, the thali celebrates hyper-local ingredients like millets, buransh and *bhang* (hemp) leaves. The buransh *sharbat* (juice) was a refreshing appetizer, and the bhang chutney prepared using the hemp leaves tasted exotic.

Beyond the kitchen, rhododendrons have caught the fascination of climate scientists for their ecological significance. The delayed blooming of these flowers across the Hindu Kush Himalaya in recent times serves as a stark indicator of environmental shifts, and the impact of human existence on nature. The buransh is more than just a flower— treks are named after rhododendrons and handcrafted wine is made from its petals. When the blooming season is delayed it postpones treks and disrupts the wine-making season.

The writer on a Himalayan trail carpeted with rhododendrons.

Now that I'm living in Shillong, snugged away in the wilderness of northeast India, I've come to appreciate the special reverence the gurans command here and the creative ways local communities of Meghalaya and Nagaland states add value to this beloved bloom. Sun-dried petals are sold as packets to make instant buransh tea, ensuring sustainable livelihood to many locals.


Glasses of buransh juice, served at Parvada Bungalows.

TEA TIME

Bluedot Living Kitchen doesn't recommend harvesting and cooking with rhododendron flowers, as many of them are poisonous. But if you want a taste of the region, you can order buransh teas made by herbalists. Here are a few available on Amazon:

- **Rhododendron Flower Tea**
- **Rhododendron Organic Tulsi**
- **Rhododendron Organic Tulsi and Buransh Flower**

Or plan a visit to **Parvada Bungalows** for a spring celebration of buransh.

Happy Hens Lay Thousands of Eggs

Luie Nevarez, a third-generation San Diego farmer, and his wife, Chloe, are raising champion eggs.

Story, recipes, and photos by *Nicole Litvack*

Luie and Chloe Nevarez with their family at Happy Hens Farm.

COURTESY OF CHLOE NEVAREZ

I park my car in the dusty parking lot outside the store at Happy Hens Farm, a highly productive regenerative chicken ranch in Ramona, California. The farm's llama, Dolly (yes, Dolly llama) greets me immediately — maybe not so much greeting me as approaching me like I'm a predator. Dolly guards the hens with the help of two Anatolian shepherds, a type of "livestock guardian" dog bred to protect hens from any predators that might creep down from the mountain range above. The ranch is situated just below a mountainous nature reserve rife with bobcats, mountain lions, and coyotes.

"Predators were a real issue for us in the beginning," Chloe, wearing a cowboy hat and scuffed Blundstones, tells me. "We lost so much to bobcats and coyotes. Our goal is to work with the ecosystem. We don't want to trap or do anything to hinder the system around us. We really want to do things that are going to be beneficial to our entire environment. The dogs do great at just keeping things out, so we don't have to do anything to hurt any of the animals around us."

Growing to Meet Demands

In the wake of national egg shortages, Luie and Chloe have expanded their operations significantly to meet growing needs without compromising the integrity of the product. What began as a small regenerative farm has grown to include about 16,000 hens, with another 2,600 set to arrive in April. The increased demand has also driven more people directly to the farm; Happy Hens eggs often sell out quickly in stores, with deliveries limited to once a week. This growth has allowed them to remain committed to their original mission: producing the best possible eggs without cutting any corners.

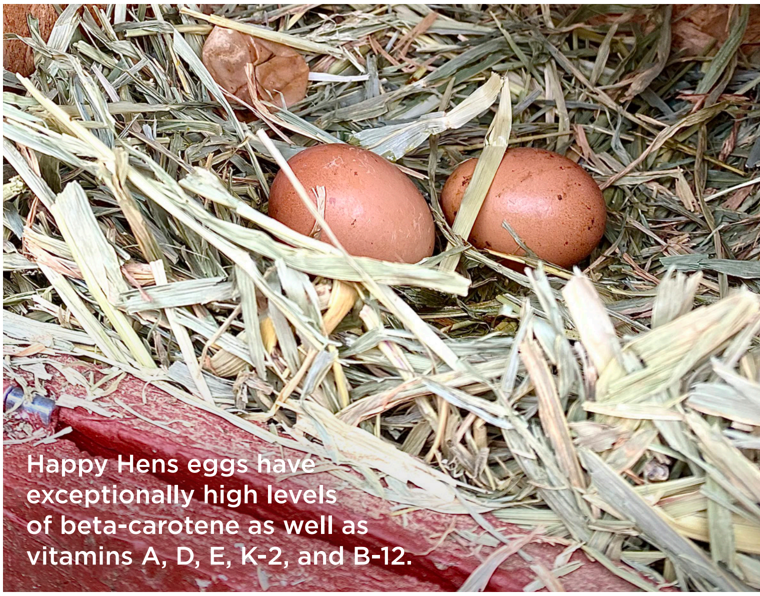
Expanded business has meant a growing community as well. In addition to their farm store, Happy Hens now features a playground surrounded by a petting zoo for both adults and children to experience a taste of farm life. They've launched a weekly educational program for TK (transitional kindergarten) through 8th grade and other classes for up to 12th grade. They also host a weekly ministry gathering. Soon they'll open a coffee shop and will offer farm-to-table dinners to showcase local meats and produce and share more about all they are creating at Happy Hens.

Thousands of Hens

The pasture is lush with greenery at the moment after a particularly rainy season. There's plenty of wild grass and juicy bugs for the ladies to enjoy as they graze around the pasture. In addition to the wild vegetation, the hens have access to the highest-quality, completely organic-certified, non-GMO, corn-free, and soy-free feed. The ingredients in the feed are sesame seed, alfalfa, milo, barley, and wheat. Not only are all of those ingredients verified and certified, but Happy Hens also conducts their own additional testing to make sure there is absolutely no GMO or glyphosate pesticide residue on the feed.

While the hens spend their days outdoors, they do have access to mobile barns for laying and sleeping at night. Happy Hens actually coined the phrase "Truly Outdoors." The mobile barns are equipped with open slatted floors, so after the chickens eat the grass and bugs from the ground, they deposit it as manure back into the earth. The barns, and hens, are then moved to another part of the pasture so the land can regenerate. This practice helps to create the most nutrient-dense earth for the hens to graze on.

The value of this pasture isn't just in the open space or the access to wild-grown food and bugs, it's also in the long days out in the sunshine. The hens have access to shade and shelter whenever they want, but they love to sunbathe — and in Ramona there is usually no shortage of sunshine. Between their diet of healthy greens and their lifestyle of nearly endless sunshine, these birds are laying some super nutrient-dense eggs.



Happy Hens eggs have exceptionally high levels of beta-carotene as well as vitamins A, D, E, K-2, and B-12.

> In the wake of national egg shortages, Luie and Chloe have expanded their operations significantly to meet growing needs without compromising the integrity of the product.

Happy Hens produces eggs with exceptionally high levels of beta-carotene as well as vitamins A, D, E, K-2, and B-12. Chloe says these eggs contain about seven times the nutrients of a conventionally produced egg. "They really become like a golden egg," Chloe giggles as a lone white rooster lets out a warning call. They're trained to warn the flock of any predators overhead like hawks and eagles; although today the predator might have been me.

Happy Hens has been rated the number one egg in California and third in the nation.

Open space is no issue for these birds. At Happy Hens, the birds have 218 square feet a piece! The property itself is vast, spanning 60 acres. With the mountain range behind it, the pasture feels virtually endless. I imagine from the birds' point of view that it is endless.

What Does "Free Range" or "Pasture Raised" Mean?

I was shocked to discover that there is currently no legal definition for "free range" or "pasture raised" in the United States, meaning that foods with these labels can be packaged and sold to consumers with no unilateral definition of what they mean.

The **Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC)** has created their own researched-based definitions and criteria for these labels: The "pasture raised" requirement is 1,000 birds per 2.5 acres or 108 square feet per bird. Their "free range" requirement is two square feet of space per bird and birds must be outdoors (weather permitting) for at least six hours per day. This is opposed to the **USDA's** (and industry standard) definition that says "free range" birds must have access to the outdoors, which could be through a "pop hole" as opposed to full-body access.

The HFAC "pasture raised" requirements include the aforementioned open space, rotating fields, and a year-round life outdoors (weather permitting) with access to mobile or fixed housing where hens can sleep at night. Chloe mentions their commitment to going above and beyond any certification standards that exist. "We're here to serve people. We're here to love people and give them this great experience of reconnecting to where their products are coming from."

Their devotion to excellence has not gone unnoticed. Happy Hens has been rated the number one egg in California by the **Cornucopia Institute's Egg Scorecard**. They are also rated number three in the nation after **Eight Mile Creek Farm in New York** and Oregon's **Sublime Organics**.

Third Generation Egg Farmers

Luie's grandparents moved to Ramona from The Netherlands in 1957 and started a small chicken farm not too far from where the Happy Hens farm is now. As a young man, Luie decided he wanted to do things differently, step away from conventional egg farming, and develop a truly sustainable and regenerative program that would be most beneficial for both the environment and the consumer. He earned a bachelor of science in agriculture and business from Cal State Poly, and started building Happy Hens in 2012.

As he was building the business, he continued to work on his family's conventional chicken farm. "There's usually a large building, temperature controlled, with thousands of birds packed together," Luie says. "You're basically trying to get the most eggs you can by producing them on the cheapest possible route." Luie is tall and slightly sunburned with ocean blue eyes. He wears a Carhartt vest over a flannel button-down and a gray hat that reads Happy Hens. "It was the exact opposite of what we are doing here," he laughs. "We give our chickens the most room we can and produce way fewer eggs, but in the long run, your egg is way more nutrient dense and your chickens are way happier."

Thousands of Eggs

A hen producing at a 100% production rate would lay approximately one egg every twenty-six hours. At Happy Hens, the birds average around 80% throughout their lifetime. With about 16,000 chickens on the farm, this means roughly 12,000 eggs per day. The team at Happy Hens collects, cleans, and packs that many eggs daily to get them out to stores as soon as possible. This workflow, combined with their network of local retailers, creates a unique distribution process for some of the freshest eggs on the market.

What struck me most about the whole operation is how much of an open book it is. Luie says he has two main goals: to give hens the healthiest environment and to give customers the most nutritious egg possible. On their website's home page they say they value transparency above all, and it is very clear to me that this is true.

EST. 2012
HAPPY HENS
OUTDOORS

An old Ford farm truck at Happy Hens.

The Hen House farm shop is open Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and sells all kinds of wonderful locally produced products like kombucha and bone broth. ***There are also many grocery stores and restaurants in San Diego, Orange, and Los Angeles counties selling their eggs.***

VEGGIE-PACKED BAKED EGGS

Don't trash that last bit of sautéed greens or zucchini on the table. Don't give up on the tomato that's just about to turn either. Bake 'em with eggs instead. "Eggs en Cocotte" is a fancy name for ramekin-baked eggs. I recommend eating them with "soldiers" or finger-width slices of toasted bread or in my case country sourdough fried in olive oil and scratched with raw garlic.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

1 Tbsp	butter
1/2–1 cup	leftover veggies
4	eggs
	Salt and pepper
2–4 Tbsps	olive oil or more if needed
2	slices sourdough bread
2	cloves garlic
	Flaky salt such as **Maldon**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Take 4 oven-safe ramekins and coat the insides with butter. Divide leftover veggies of choice evenly among the 4 ramekins and then crack an egg in each one. Season with salt and pepper.

2. Position the ramekins in a casserole dish and use a tea kettle to pour hot water into the dish (around the ramekins) so that it hits the outside of the ramekins at about halfway. Bake the eggs for 20 to 22 minutes depending on how firm you want them.

3. While the eggs cook, make the toast "soldiers." Heat the olive oil in a cast iron or stainless steel skillet. Add the bread when it starts to glisten and fry until golden and toasty, flip and fry the other side. You may need to add more olive oil. Remove the fried bread from the pan and rub each side with a sliced garlic clove while still hot. Finish with flaky salt such as Maldon and slice into soldiers. Serve alongside the eggs.

NOTES

- Baked eggs can be cooked with any leftovers that go well with eggs from small bits of bacon, sautéed mushrooms, and fried potato to sautéed greens or fresh peas. I used leftover asparagus, zucchini, scallions, and tomatoes.

- Fresh herbs such as mint, chives, tarragon, or parsley make for an excellent garnish.

- Beyond salt and pepper, try seasoning with **espelette pepper**, **hot or sweet smoked paprika**, or a bit of **smoked salt**.

KITCHEN SINK FRITTATA

Recipe and photos by *Nicole Litvack*

A frittata is a fast and delicious way to make a meal out of any extra vegetables hanging around in the fridge. You know that saying about "anything but the kitchen sink"? This recipe encourages you to get creative. It can be served hot or cold and enjoyed any time of the day. You can also put the leftovers in between bread with a swipe of garlicky mayo and a handful of salad greens for a simple protein-packed sandwich.

Serves 4–6

INGREDIENTS

2 Tbsps	olive oil or butter (more if needed)
1–2 cups	leftover veggies
	Salt and pepper
5	eggs
1/4 cup	heavy cream or crème fraîche
+/- 1/2 cup	shredded cheese such as Parmesan, Gruyère, or Cheddar (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 400° F.

2. Heat the oil or butter in an oven-safe, egg-friendly pan and cook or heat the vegetables. Add salt and pepper. Whisk together the eggs and cream while the vegetables cook.

3. Top vegetables with cheese if using and then pour the egg mixture evenly over the cheese and veggies.

4. Allow frittata to cook over low heat for 2 minutes before transferring to a hot oven. Finish in the oven for another 8 to 10 minutes or until eggs are cooked through. If you prefer a darker top, you can always finish under the broiler, taking care not to burn it.

5. Leave frittata to cool slightly before serving warm or cold.

NOTES

- Leftover cooked veggies just need a warm-up, so if you're using some raw, just sauté those first, and then add your cooked leftovers. I used leftover asparagus, zucchini, tomato, scallions, and Gruyère.
- Fresh herbs such as chives, mint, parsley, and tarragon make for an excellent garnish.
- Beyond salt and pepper, try seasoning with **espelette pepper**, **hot or sweet smoked paprika**, or a bit of **smoked salt**.
- Crème fraîche and **plant-based caviar** make for an elegant garnish.
- Frittata will last in the fridge for up to four days.

Laura McLean in her California garden.

RANDI BAIRD

HERBS Secret Stars *of the* Garden and Kitchen

How to grow herbs in your home garden that you'll actually use!

By *Laura McLean*

Herbs are a great way to jump-start your home garden —they are forgiving to new gardeners and pack a big punch when you want to spice up a dish or show off your cocktail skills. Add herbs grown a few steps from your kitchen to your cooking and take a meal from drab to fab.

When I started gardening, I thought I had to have a whole bed dedicated to herbs. I quickly realized I didn't use that many herbs and giving up prime real estate to something I used a pinch of here or there wasn't the best use of my limited space. So I started utilizing pots or intermixing them as companion plants with my vegetables and flowers.

Growing Herbs in Pots

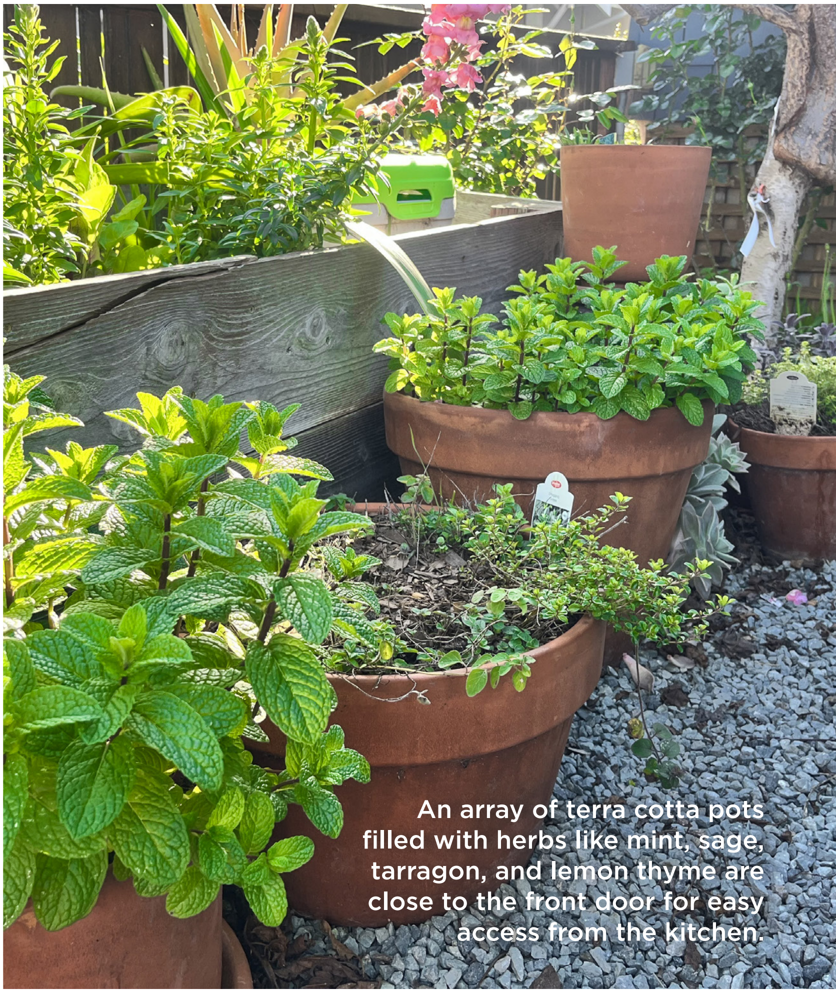
I love adding terra cotta pots throughout the vegetable garden to add interest and texture against our wood and metal raised beds. Using pots as my preferred planting method allows me to accomplish a few goals.

• I can easily move my herbs around throughout the year to dodge or enhance their sun exposure, allowing me to grow certain herbs year-round. (If you live in a colder climate than my hometown San Diego, you can even bring them indoors.)

• Pots help keep things nice and tidy in the garden, allowing me to quickly find the herb I am looking for.

• Unruly herbs, like mint or oregano, won't spread beyond the pot as they would in a bed or the ground.

• I can easily put pots right near my kitchen door. When you are sautéeing up your favorite dish and realize you forgot the basil, oregano, or whatever herb you need, and the thought of walking down 20 stairs to the backyard garden seems like descending Mount Everest, you will be happy they are right outside your front door — trust me!



An array of terra cotta pots filled with herbs like mint, sage, tarragon, and lemon thyme are close to the front door for easy access from the kitchen.

LAURA MCLEAN

10 TIPS FOR GROWING HEARTY, HANDY HERBS

1. Pick herbs you like and will eat. This might sound silly, but it's easy to get distracted at the garden center and end up with a tray of herbs you have never heard of (and will never use).

2. Remember herbs have growing seasons just like our vegetable friends. Cilantro and parsley love the cool season, while basil and mint thrive in the warm season. Ask at your local nursery or search online about what and when to plant for your **gardening zone**. (For example, this is a **helpful tool** for zones 9 and 10, common in Southern California.)

3. Many herbs, like mint, oregano, and thyme, are perennials and will keep coming back season after season. When I start to see new growth, I simply add a few handfuls of compost over or around the new growth. Annual herbs, like basil, cilantro, and parsley, will need to be replanted each season.

4. Use herbs as companion plants and intermix them in your beds at the border. Some herbs, like chives and garlic, are natural pest deterrents, making them multi-functional. Other herbs (basil and rosemary) will bring the pollinators or act as host plants (dill) for swallowtail butterflies.

5. Incorporate herbs that go beyond culinary uses and have medicinal purposes, like calendula or lavender. These can be dried and made into homemade salves, body oils, or scrubs.

6. Plant close to your kitchen for quick and easy access.

7. If you have a small space, grow potted herbs on your balcony, porch, or deck.

8. Try growing herbs indoors right on your kitchen counter. Talk about proximity! Make sure to place your herbs in a sunny window or try an indoor grow system, such as the **Aerogarden Planter** or the **Lettuce Grow Farmstand**.

9. Harvest and keep harvesting! Many herbs do well when they are routinely harvested, promoting new growth. Utilize the "cut and come again" method, just taking what you need for your dish. If you are pruning back a perennial, you can trim back up to 50% of the plant without fear of killing it.

10. Homegrown herbs don't always have to be fresh. Try drying or freezing herbs to use throughout the year. You can freeze herbs in ice cube trays with an oil of your choice or water.

The Basics of *Nutritional Yeast*

Why this plant-based ingredient deserves a spot in your pantry.

Story, photos, and recipes by ***Emily Cain***

Nutritional yeast, playfully referred to as "nooch" by fans, is a flaky yellow powder beloved for its savory flavor and, fittingly, its nutritional value. You may have seen it at the grocery store in the health foods aisle or next to the spices and passed it without knowing what a versatile superfood it is. Nooch is a great staple to have in your kitchen — it is loaded with benefits for your health and the environment, is easy to use, and tastes great.

What Is It?

While nutritional yeast is well known and loved among vegans and vegetarians, it may be fairly unfamiliar to omnivores. Nutritional yeast comes from the same type of yeast used to bake bread, a strain called *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, which is cultivated in sugary liquid and then fermented. Unlike baker's yeast, nutritional yeast is heated to deactivate the live cultures. Once deactivated and dried, it's fortified with additional folic acid and B vitamins. This results in sprinkle-on-anything flakes that add a cheesy, slightly nutty, umami flavor and loads of nutrients to your plate.

Why You Should Eat It

Nutritional yeast is aptly named. Just two tablespoons of it contains five grams of protein and is extremely rich in B vitamins, including B12, which is particularly beneficial for vegans and vegetarians, who miss out on this by not eating animal products like meat, eggs, and dairy. Because of its cheesy flavor, it also makes a great non-dairy substitute for Parmesan and other cheeses. Adding nutritional yeast to your diet helps you get in these vital nutrients while cutting back on animal products and their negative environmental impacts.

Bluedot's Marketplace editor Elizabeth Weinstein, who has an extensive background in the food industry, uses **Bragg's nutritional yeast** and touts the power of nooch. "Whatever your diet, it's a great item to get to know," says Elizabeth. "It's unassuming, inexpensive, and surprisingly flavorful."

How to Use It

The most popular way to use nutritional yeast is sprinkled on popcorn, but you can sprinkle it on anything you'd put cheese on.

Sprinkle it on ...

- Popcorn
- Pasta
- Salads
- Roasted vegetables
- Tacos
- Baked potatoes
- Avocado toast

Nutritional yeast is great when incorporated in sauces, dressing, or soups. It can be a key ingredient in making non-dairy cheese sauce for nachos or mac 'n' cheese (page 57) and makes the perfect substitute for Parmesan cheese in Caesar dressing, creamy risotto, or pesto (page 56).

SHUTTERSTOCK

VEGAN PESTO

This vegan pesto uses nutritional yeast in place of the Parmesan used in traditional recipes. Spread this on a sandwich, mix it into warm pasta, or add it to a salad! It keeps in the fridge for about 5 days.

Makes about 1 cup

INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup	pine nuts
2 cups	basil
1 cup	spinach
3	garlic cloves, chopped
1/2 cup	olive oil
3 Tbsps	nutritional yeast
	Fresh lemon juice to taste
	Red pepper flakes, if desired

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place a pan on medium-low heat. Once the pan is heated, add the pine nuts and toss them occasionally to prevent burning. Toast until the pine nuts are golden brown and fragrant, about 4 minutes.

2. In a food processor, add the toasted pine nuts, greens, and garlic. Pulse until coarsely chopped.

3. While your food processor is running, drizzle in the olive oil. Then add the nutritional yeast, lemon juice, and red pepper flakes, if using. Taste and adjust seasonings to your liking.

NOTES

No food processor? No problem. Pesto is a traditional sauce that has been made long before food processors. While it is a nice tool to have and makes the process a lot quicker, it is not necessary. You can use a blender, manual food chopper, mortar and pestle, or just a knife and cutting board to chop up the ingredients.

USE UP YOUR GREENS

To eliminate potential food waste, adjust the measurements in this recipe according to whatever greens you have on hand. Basil, spinach, arugula, and more all work great in pesto.

VEGAN MAC 'N' CHEESE

Nutritional yeast is the star of this recipe. It gives the vegan cheese sauce a perfectly golden color and a satisfying cheesy flavor, all without the dairy. Plus, nooch adds a boost of protein and vitamin B12 — two essential nutrients to add to any plant-based meal. You can use protein pasta for even more protein per serving, too. I like **Goodles Loopdy-Loos** for the added protein and because the sauce goops up deliciously in the spirals. A more accurate name for this recipe is probably Noodles 'n' Nooch!

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

8 oz	pasta
1/4 cup	vegan butter
3 Tbsps	all purpose flour
2 cups	canned coconut milk
1/2 cup	vegetable stock
1/2 cup	nutritional yeast
2 1/2 Tbsps	Dijon mustard
2 tsps	garlic powder
2 tsps	onion powder
1 tsp	smoked paprika
	Black pepper to taste
	Chives to garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the pasta according to package instructions. Strain the pasta and let it sit in the strainer while you prepare the sauce.

2. In the same pot you used to cook the pasta, heat the butter until melted. Then add the flour and mix together vigorously.

3. Pour the coconut milk and vegetable stock into the pot and whisk out any lumps. Whisk continuously until it has started to boil and just starts to thicken, about 5 minutes.

4. Remove the pan from the heat and add the nutritional yeast, Dijon mustard, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, and pepper. Mix until all of the ingredients are fully incorporated. Taste and adjust seasonings to your liking.

5. Add the cooked pasta back into the pan and fold it into the sauce.

6. Serve warm (see the note below for a crispy, baked version of this dish). Sprinkle on some chives or a dash of paprika to garnish.

NOTES

- **Bake it!** If you want baked mac 'n' cheese with a crispy top, preheat your oven to 400°F. Mix your favorite seasonings in 2/3 cup of breadcrumbs. I like paprika, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, and pepper. Coat the breadcrumbs in olive oil. Transfer your mac 'n' cheese to a baking dish, and sprinkle the breadcrumbs evenly over the top. Bake for 20 minutes, or until the topping is golden brown.

- **Add in veggies.** Adult-ify your mac 'n' cheese by adding in veggies like broccoli, peas, or mushrooms. My favorite way to quickly add a pop of color to a pasta dish is with spinach. Place the spinach in your strainer and drain your pasta over it. The hot water will instantly steam and wilt the spinach, saving you a step!

SOME SUSTAINABLE BRANDS

to Help You Stock Your Pantry

By *Elizabeth Weinstein, Marketplace Editor*

As someone who's spent the majority of the last decade writing about food in some capacity, I thought I'd have a lot to say for this newsletter about that all-important hub of the kitchen: the pantry. But I have little universal advice on specifics, simply because pantries are so personal. What I aim to do is help you identify companies that can connect you with the items you care about. If you'd like to learn about more sustainable goods, **sign up for the BuyBetter Marketplace newsletter** or visit the **Bluedot Marketplace**.

Misfits Market
PERISHABLE FOOD INSIDE PLEASE REFRIGERATE

FOCUS ON FOOD WASTE

Misfits offers perfectly good produce and packaged goods at a discount. The items don't make it to stores because of sizing, cosmetic, and packaging discrepancies, or simple supply chain issues. **Shop now.**

UPGRADED PLANT MILKS

One Bluedot columnist has "never been so pleased by a non-dairy cappuccino" as by the one she made at home with Joi's tasty, just-add-water plant milk concentrates. **Shop now.**

Almond Milk Concentrate
Made with just almonds!
Cashew Milk Concentrate
Made with just cashews!
1 Jar = 7 Quarts

THRIVE MARKET
Belong to a better market
CHOMPS
Kettle & Fire
Simple Mills
SCOUT

VALUES-DRIVEN SHOPPING

Thrive has tons of items from great brands at very low prices, and offsets all shipping. I recommend their house label for organic oils, nuts, and sugars. A membership will quickly pay for itself. **Shop now.**

HEART-WARMING BROTH

Brodo uses only pasture-raised beef and poultry and organic vegetables for its wonderful bone broths. A new, shelf-stable formulation streamlines shipping (and makes it more eco-friendly).
Shop now.

FLOUR POWER

King Arthur's White Whole Wheat Flour comes from regeneratively grown wheat; the company pledges that its other (terrific) flours will follow suit by 2030. They also sell quality tools and ingredients and offer online classes.
Shop now.

TRULY NICE SPICE

Burlap & Barrel's Single-Origin Spices will be the most flavorful you've ever tasted. Refresh your pantry before you start all your cold-weather baking, mulling, and roasting.
Shop now.

SNACKS FOR ACTIVISTS

Patagonia Provisions approaches food with the same purpose its parent company brings to clothing. The delicious tinned seafood, dried fruit, jerkies, and more all have impressive sustainability stories.
Shop now.

Find more **BuyBetter ideas for food and kitchen.**
HAPPY SHOPPING AND HAPPY NOSHING!

Vibrant Veggie *Tarts*

Recipes and photos by *Vanessa Seder*

Hearty vegetables take center stage in these three savory tart recipes featuring a variety of flaky, buttery crusts (filo dough, puff pastry, and buckwheat). A great option for vegetarians, these versatile and visually pleasing tarts are centerpiece-worthy and will leave eaters satiated. Serve with a simple salad to round out the meal. For an additional vegetable-forward tart, check out my **Roasted Squash and Chestnut Tart**.

KALE AND FETA TARTLETTES

Inspired by the flavors of the Greek spanikopita (spinach pie), this recipe pairs lacinato kale (or dinosaur kale) with creamy ricotta and briny and tangy feta cheese, with happy results. These are great to throw into a lunch box. No sad desk lunch anymore!

Makes 12

INGREDIENTS

6 Tbsps	unsalted butter, melted, for brushing
2 Tbsps	olive oil
1/2 cup	thinly sliced shallots (about 1 to 2 shallots)
6 cups	finely chopped lacinato kale leaves with center stems removed (from 2 large bunches)
1	large clove garlic, finely chopped
1 cup	whole milk ricotta
1/3 cup	crumbled feta cheese
1/4 cup	thinly sliced scallions
1/4 cup	chopped fresh dill, plus more for garnish
1 Tbsp	fresh lemon zest
1/2 tsp	fine sea salt
1/2 tsp	freshly ground black pepper
6	12 x 17-inch filo pastry sheets thawed according to package instructions

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Have a 12-cup standard-sized nonstick muffin tin ready. Lightly brush the inside of each cup with melted butter.

2. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Add the olive oil and shallots, and cook until golden brown in parts, about 3 minutes. Add the kale and cook, stirring constantly until completely wilted, about 6 minutes. Stir in the garlic until cooked through and fragrant, about 1 more minute. Transfer the kale mixture to a large bowl and let cool slightly, about 10 minutes.

3. Add the ricotta, feta, scallions, dill, lemon zest, salt, and pepper to the bowl, and stir well to combine. Set aside.

4. Working quickly, lay a sheet of filo dough onto a large cutting board and brush all over with the melted butter. Top with another sheet of filo and more melted butter, repeat this process with the remaining 4 filo sheets until your filo is 6 layers thick.

5. Use a sharp chef's knife to cut the filo into 12 4 x 3-inch rectangles. Press a square gently into each of the 12 cups of the muffin pan. Divide the filling evenly among the filo crusts.

6. Bake the tartlets until the filo is light golden brown and crisp, and the filling is cooked through, about 20 to 25 minutes. Let cool slightly before popping out of the pan and serving. Garnish with more fresh dill, if desired.

WILD MUSHROOM AND WALNUT PUFF PASTRY TART

Caramelized mushrooms top a ground walnut, garlic, and Parmesan filling in this rich, umami-forward, flaky tart. Suitable to bring to an upscale gathering, this tart is best served warm.

Makes 1 10 x 12-inch tart

INGREDIENTS

1 3/4 cups	raw walnut halves
4 Tbsps	extra-virgin olive oil, divided
2 cups	thinly sliced yellow onions
1	clove chopped garlic
1 cup	grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese (about 2 oz)
1	puff pastry sheet (from 1 17.3-oz package), thawed according to package instructions
1 lb	wild mushrooms, such as chestnut, lion's mane, oyster, baby king trumpet, or shiitake, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
1 Tbsp	fresh chopped rosemary
1 Tbsp	sherry vinegar
1/2 tsp	fine sea salt
1/2 tsp	freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley sprigs

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

2. Place the walnuts on a standard-sized baking sheet, place in the oven until fragrant and roasted, about 13 to 15 minutes. Let them cool on the pan, about 10 minutes. Transfer 1 1/2 cups of the nuts to the bowl of a food processor and set aside. Reserve the remaining 1/4 cup nuts for the topping. Raise the oven temperature to 400°F.

3. Meanwhile, heat a large cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and the onions and cook, tossing a few times until the onions are soft and golden brown, about 8 minutes. Transfer the onions to the food processor with the nuts and let cool slightly, about 15 minutes.

4. Add the garlic and Parmesan to the food processor, then pulse until the walnuts and onions are finely chopped.

5. On a lightly floured surface, roll the puff pastry into a 10 x 12-inch rectangle. Then transfer to a parchment-lined standard baking sheet. Use the tines of a fork to prick the puff pastry all over leaving a 1-inch thick un-pricked border.

6. Spread the walnut mixture over the top of the pricked part of the puff pastry. Bake until the puff pastry is golden brown and the walnut mixture has turned a richer brown color, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer to a cooling rack.

7. Meanwhile, heat a large cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the remaining 3 tablespoons of olive oil and the mushrooms and cook, flipping a few times with a spatula until browned in parts, about 5 minutes.

8. Add the rosemary to the mushrooms and cook, tossing occasionally just until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Drizzle the vinegar over and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper. Top the prepared crust with the mushrooms, reserved walnuts, and garnish with parsley. Serve warm.

BEET AND CHÈVRE GALETTE
WITH BUCKWHEAT CRUST

A galette is a rustic, free-form tart whose dough is rolled flat and topped with a mound of filling. The dough's edges are then brought up and tucked in over the filling, creating a sort of open-top package. This savory and sweet galette combines beets, creamy and tangy goat-milk chèvre, along with fresh thyme and a drizzle of honey. The crust uses buckwheat flour, a whole grain, gluten-free flour that imparts a nutty, earthy flavor.

Makes 1 10-inch galette

INGREDIENTS

2 lbs	red and yellow beets, greens and tops trimmed, scrubbed (about 4 beets)
1 cup	all-purpose flour
3/4 cup	buckwheat flour
1/2 tsp	sea salt
1/4 cup	(1/2 stick) cold butter, cut into small pieces
5 Tbsps	olive oil, divided
4–6 Tbsps	ice water
3 oz	chèvre cheese
1 Tbsp	fresh thyme leaves, plus more for garnish
1/2 tsp	flaky salt
1/4 tsp	freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbsps	honey

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Wrap each beet loosely in a large piece of foil. Place the beets on a standard-sized baking sheet, and roast until a paring knife is easily inserted into the middle of the beets, about 1 hour. Remove from the oven, unwrap each beet carefully as hot steam will escape, and let rest and cool for about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Use a paring knife or vegetable peeler to peel the skins off the beets, then slice them into 1/4-inch-thick rounds. Set aside.

2. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk together the all-purpose flour, buckwheat flour, and salt. Add the butter and 4 tablespoons of olive oil to the flour. Use clean hands or a pastry cutter to work in the butter and oil until pea-size crumbs form. Add the ice water a few tablespoons at a time, and using a large spoon or clean hands, mix until a dough comes together. The dough will appear crumbly. To test if the dough is ready, place a bit in the palm of your hand and close your hand tightly around the dough. If the dough holds together, it's ready; if not, add more water 1 tablespoon at a time and continue testing in the same manner until the dough is ready.

3. Transfer the crumbly dough to the center of a large piece of parchment paper placed on a counter or flat work surface. Use clean hands to spread the dough into a large round disk, about 1-inch thick. Bring up the edges of the parchment paper to wrap the dough. Use a rolling pin to roll over the dough a few times until flattened to a roughly 1/2-inch-thick round. Transfer the dough to the refrigerator to let rest for about 30 minutes to 1 hour.

4. Lower the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

5. On a lightly floured surface, use a rolling pin to roll the dough out to a roughly 11-inch circle and transfer to the prepared baking sheet.

6. Arrange the beet slices on the dough leaving a 1-inch border around the edges. Crimp the dough over the edges of the beets forming a 10-inch round galette.

7. Drizzle the beets with the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil, then top the beets with dollops of chèvre, thyme leaves, flaky salt, and pepper.

8. Bake until the crust is crisp and browned in parts, 40 to 45 minutes. Transfer to a cooling rack to cool slightly, about 15 minutes. Drizzle with honey and garnish with more fresh thyme, if desired, before slicing and serving.

SOURCING SUSTAINABLE HONEY

The commercial honey industry has many negative impacts on the environment and can be an ethical gray zone, so consider visiting a farmers market and buying your honey from a local beekeeper.

LA GRITONA
TEQUILA

GOOD LIBATIONS

On CINCO DE MAYO, Give TEQUILA A SHOT

COURTESY OF LA GRITONA DISTILLERY

By ***Julia Cooper***

The best tequila is created with care for the land. Here's why that matters — and how you can find a tequila that goes down smooth.

Tequila is a distilled spirit made from the blue agave plant that is produced in five areas of Mexico: Jálisco (where ~99% of tequila is produced), Guanajuato, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, and Nayarit. Tequila is a subcategory of mezcal — mezcal has no regional limitations on its designation and can be made from any variety of agave, not just blue agave.

The United States consumes more tequila per capita annually than any other country in the world, including Mexico, where tequila is the national drink. Each year, American consumers spend $2.9 billion dollars on margaritas, nearly 15% of all cocktail sales. With increased popularity and demand, there's increased production pressure from Mexico's agave fields. This has a cascading impact not only on the quality of tequila being produced by large-scale industrial distilling operations (the likes of which are often contracted to produce the many celebrity tequilas on the market), but also on the land and soils of Jálisco.

With tequila, as is the case with any agricultural product, the more care taken with the plants and the land, the higher the quality of the resulting product. To produce tequila in a way that respects both the traditions of the spirit and the resources used in the distilling process, agave should be harvested when it is fully matured. It can take up to seven years for an agave plant to reach full maturity. Mature agave is rich with juices and extractable matter that can be carefully crafted into delicate and complex tequilas that are rich with *terroir*, or the characteristics of the land. With rapid increases in demand for tequila, agave farmers and tequila producers do not always have seven years to wait for the plants to reach full maturity. So, what do they do?

Enter: the diffuser.

The diffuser is a controversial piece of tequila production technology that uses water and sulfuric acid to extract 98 to 99% of the available sugars from raw, young agave (often only one to two years old). This allows for faster crop rotation and a quicker turnaround on the production of a greater quantity of bottled tequila. However, immature agave plants provide significantly less raw material than mature ones, which decreases the efficiency of the agave supply over time and leads to the periodic agave shortages we've seen in recent years. Further, because younger agave plants have underdeveloped roots and rapid harvest cycles prevent helpful biodiversity from developing in the plots, the topsoil of these crops is increasingly vulnerable to wind and rain, which has devastating long-term effects on Mexico's landscape.

When agave is harvested too young, the plant is less developed and cannot be meaningfully transformed into a tequila without serious manipulation and additives. Tequila that is made with immature agave plants with a diffuser lacks the depth and richness of a tequila made with plants that are well cared for. Also, tequila that is made using a diffuser often has a characteristically medicinal taste that most find unpleasant even after manufacturers use additives to further homogenize the taste. But how can we know if a tequila has been made with a diffuser?

Rob Gerard is the founder of the **Tequila Collective**, an online community of tequila enthusiasts who share a passion for understanding and sharing the history of tequila from its origins in the Aztec Empire to its modern expressions today. When thinking about how the average consumer can knowledgeably engage with tequila, he says, "The biggest issue with the tequila industry is a lack of transparency."

According to Rob, the easiest way to gain insight into the contents of a tequila bottle is with the app **Tequila Matchmaker**, which has an "additive-free program" based on the founders' visits to distilleries. "They have to be invited since they aren't any kind of officially regulatory body — and they confirm that the tequila is being made with no additives."

For more advanced tequila drinkers, you can start to recognize different NOMs (*Normas Oficiales Mexicanas*), or four-digit codes that denote a tequila's originating distillery: "If something's coming from NOM 1579, which is the El Pandillo distillery, I know that that's going to be a good quality product, even if I've never tried that specific tequila. Whereas if I'm getting something from the José Cuervo NOM [1104], chances are it's mass produced, they're using additives, and it's not a very good product. They're using immature agave, and that's why they have to use additives to sweeten it up, make it drinkable," Rob explains.

Between the field and the glass, agave passes through many complex and intersecting systems. The issues with the modern tequila industry extend from farming and production practices to labor exploitation and lack of government regulation. Though it is easy to become frustrated with the whirlwind of interests entangled in consciously consuming tequila, we are not without hope! With increased attention being brought to the industry by enthusiasts like the Tequila Collective, and even celebrities shining a mainstream spotlight on the spirit, there is pressure on the market to enhance transparency and give consumers more insight into what has been happening behind closed distillery doors. As the craft tequila market continues to grow, there is more demand for small-production tequilas made from sustainably farmed agaves as is true to the spirit's roots.

CINCO DE MAYO TEQUILA

My personal recommendation for a great quality tequila made with sustainability in mind is **La Gritona** Reposado. La Gritona is completely woman-owned and operated, made with fully matured agave in a diffuser-free facility, and bottled entirely in recycled glass accumulated within a mile radius of the distillery. The first time I tried La Gritona, I enjoyed sipping it straight up — something I never thought possible based on my prior tequila experiences!

- Add La Gritona (or your favorite tequila) to bring a smokey depth to fresh-squeezed, agave-sweetened lemonade (or limeade, depending on what citrus you have on hand).

La Gritona is available throughout the United States. If you're not seeing it on the shelves, put in a request with the staff at your local liquor store!

CONTRIBUTORS

LAURA MCLEAN

CONTRIBUTORS

Editor's Note: All contributors' cookbooks are available on Amazon, unless otherwise noted. Bluedot Living may earn a small commission if you purchase one of them via these links.

Cook, teacher, and author **Pascale Beale** grew up in England and France and is now based in Santa Barbara. Check out her latest cookbook, ***Flavour***.

Teresa Bergen is a Portland, Oregon–based author who specializes in the outdoors, vegan foods, and sustainable travel. Her articles appear in many publications and she's author of ***Easy Portland Outdoors*** and co-author of ***Historic Cemeteries of Portland, Oregon***.

Julia Cooper is a co-editor of Bluedot Boston and has a passion for environmentally conscious food and beverages. In addition to her work with Bluedot, she curates the natural wine/craft beer program for Black Sheep Market in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Leslie Garrett, Bluedot's editorial director, has been covering climate stories for close to two decades. She is the author of more than 15 books, including ***The Virtuous Consumer***, a book on living more sustainably.

Meenakshi J is an independent journalist based in northeast India. She writes and reports on community health, people, solutions, gender, food science, and travel. Get in touch with her **@polkajunction** on Instagram.

Nicole Litvack is a San Diego-based cook, writer, and ceramicist. She comes from a family of commercial fishermen and works as a consultant for local fisheries.

Justin McChesney-Wachs is a California native, chef, photographer, and food blogger. He lives in San Diego with his wife and two kids, and loves to travel and learn about food in as many places as he can. Recipes, tips, and techniques can be found on his blog, **Salt Pepper Skillet**.

Laura McLean is an avid gardener and marriage and family therapist. She has transformed her yard into an urban vegetable and pollinator garden, and strives to connect mental health, self-care, and a commitment to our Earth with every seed she sows.

Lily Olsen is a Bluedot Living reporter, contributing from California.

Eric Peterson has written for numerous local and national publications on topics ranging from business and technology to travel and the arts. He lives in Denver with his wife, Jamie, and their faithful hounds, Aoife and Ogma. Visit him at **ericpetersonwriter.com**.

Brooklyn-based **Caroline Saunders** trained in pastry at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and writes a **bimonthly Substack newsletter called Pale Blue Tart**.

Vanessa Seder is a recipe developer and photographer living in Portland, Maine. Her latest book is ***Warm Your Bones: 75 Cozy Recipes for Chilly Days and Winter Nights***.

Clara Silverstein is the Boston-based author of ***The Boston Chef's Table*** and co-author of ***The New England Soup Factory Cookbook***, among others. Find out more about her at her website, clarasilverstein.com.

Caroline Sörbom is a frequent contributor to Bluedot Living. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and is a graduate of the Boston University Culinary Arts and Gastronomy program.

Zanny Steffgen is a Colorado-based freelance travel writer who focuses on stories about tourism's potential for positive impact on both the environment and local communities. Visit **zannymerullosteffgen.com** to read more of her work.

Annabelle Waugh is a food writer, recipe developer, food stylist, and culinary instructor with a passion for sustainable, healthy eating.

Bluedot's Marketplace Editor, **Elizabeth Weinstein**, lives (and shops) in midtown Manhattan. **Sign up for her biweekly BuyBetter Marketplace newsletter here**.

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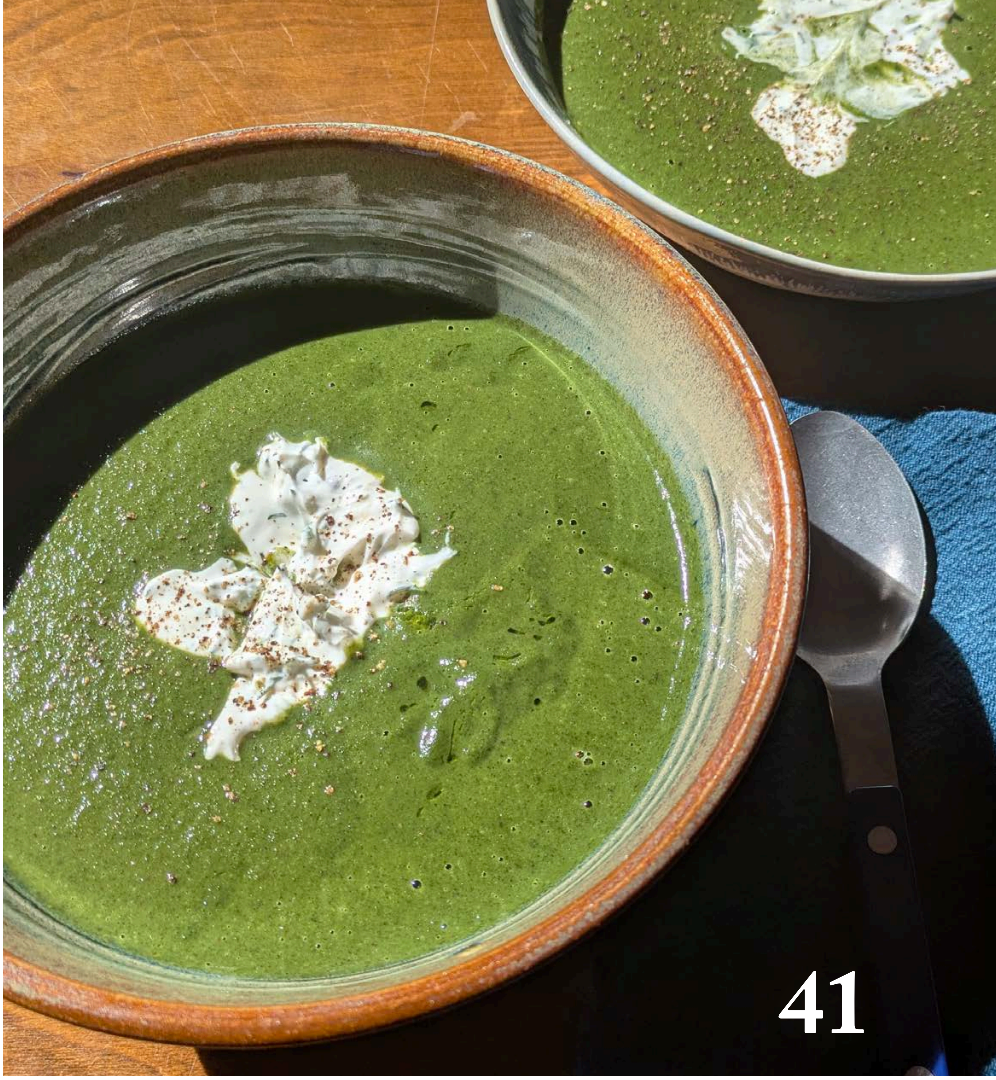

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